JAN. 6

10¢

EUSTACE L. ADAMS · T. T. FLYNN · EUSTACE COCKREL

Jan-6-1940

ARGOSY

JAN-6-1940

JAN-10-1940

WEEKLY

The Clash of Steel -- the Blood of Adventurers -- and the Battle to Keep a Nation Whole

ARCHERS TO THE FRONT

Roy deS. Horn's Superb New Novel of Fighting Men

Complete in This Issue

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Better start gargling with Listerine, Mister!

FOR COLDS AND SORE THROAT

WHEN you've got the sniffles, a chill, and your throat feels irritated, it's a sign that germs are probably at work in mouth and throat.

Sometimes they can be killed in sufficient numbers or kept under control so that Nature can halt the infection . . . throw off the cold.

If you have any symptoms of trouble, start gargling with full strength Listerine Antiseptic and keep it up. Countless people say it's a wonderful first aid and 8 years of scientific research back them up. Tests during this period actually showed fewer and milder colds for Listerine Antiseptic users . . . fewer sore throats, too.

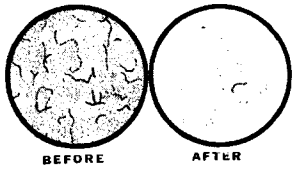
Listerine Antiseptic reaches way back on throat surfaces to kill millions of the secondary invaders — germs that many authorities say help to complicate a cold and make it so troublesome.

Actual tests showed germ reductions on mouth and throat surfaces ranging to 96.7% even 15 minutes after the Listerine Antiseptic gargle. Up to 80% one hour later.

In view of this evidence, don't you think it is a wise precaution to use Listerine Antiseptic systematically during fall, winter, and spring months when colds are a constant menace to the health of the entire family?

Lambert Pharmacal Co., *St. Louis, Mo.*

NOTE HOW LISTERINE GARGLE REDUCED GERMS!



The two drawings at left illustrate height of range in germ reductions on mouth and throat surfaces in test cases before and after gargling Listerine Antiseptic. Fifteen minutes after gargling, germ reductions up to 96.7% were noted; and even one hour after, germs were still reduced as much as 80%.

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To Ambitious Bookkeepers and Junior Accountants—

ARE YOU GETTING AHEAD THE SPEEDY WAY

—OR THE SLOW WAY?

Here's how you can find out! Answer these questions:

- Do you know *why* the management asks for each set of figures that you prepare?
- Do you see clearly *how* those figures will shape company policies?
- Do you daily *interpret* your books and your records in terms of profit and loss to your firm?
- In short, is your day-to-day work *full of meaning* to you or is it just humdrum routine?

YOUR answers to those questions would give an experienced personnel man a picture of your entire future!

For only to the man or woman who "knows what it's all about" does speedy, worthwhile promotion come. The routine worker goes ahead at a snail's pace—if at all.

Yet knowing what it's all about in bookkeeping and accounting is within reach of almost *any* office worker—provided he has ambition enough to *train* earnestly.

The road is clearly marked and an average person—like you—can travel it if he really *wants* to!

Naturally, it takes real work—work that even LaSalle, after 30 years, can only cut down, not cut out entirely.

But LaSalle can, and does, make your study interesting—easy to understand—*useful right on your present job*—if you will do *your* part.

Of course, your time for the movies, the card-table, and the radio will be somewhat less than that of those who sit and merely *hope* for promotion, or *wish* for a raise. But the hours *you* sacrifice now earn hard cash profits for you in the future.

Hundreds, yes thousands, just like you have *proved* that LaSalle-trained accountants can earn —$2,000, $3,000, $5,000 and even more. Their stories are so interesting—so full of encouragement—that we have published a whole book of them: "Success Reports."

This book is jam-packed with human interest experiences that show how bookkeepers and junior accountants who once were discouraged cogs in the business machine have today become important executives, auditors, comptrollers, and Certified Public Accountants—with good incomes and with all the prestige of real business success.

Over and over, you find such phrases as: "Then came my second raise"—"So then they made me manager"—"That first increase completely paid for my training the first two months."

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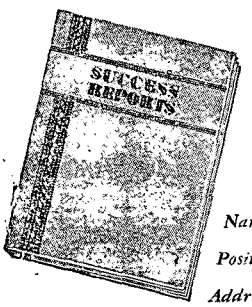

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Gentlemen:

As an ambitious (man) (woman) interested in a real future, I should like a FREE copy of "Success Reports" telling how others have built their futures through LaSalle Accountancy Training. Please send me a copy at once—without obligation on my part—also send your booklet, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays."

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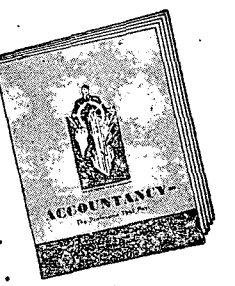

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ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 296 CONTENTS FOR JANUARY 6, 1940 Number 1

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They fight best when cornered, these Men with No Master. For with them is Robin the Bombardier, and a cargo of Devil's Fire

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Cover by Marshall Frantz
Illustrating Archers to the Front

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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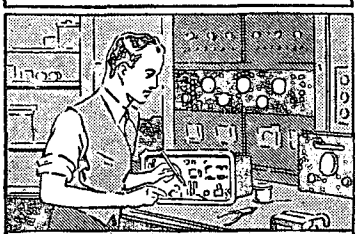
I jumped from $18 a week to $50
-- a Free Book started me toward this
GOOD PAY IN RADIO

HERE'S *How it Happened*

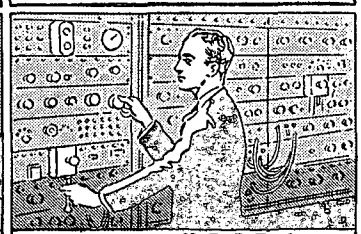
by S. J. E.
(NAME AND ADDRESS SENT UPON REQUEST)

"I had an $18 a week job in a shoe factory. I'd probably be at it today if I hadn't read about the opportunities in Radio and started training at home for them."

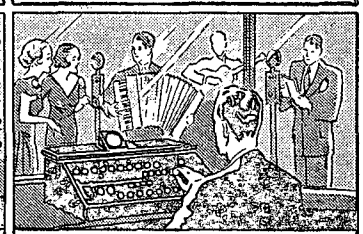
"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make $5 to $10 a week in spare time servicing Radio Sets."



"When I finished training I accepted a job as serviceman with a Radio store. In three weeks I was made service manager at more than twice what I earned in the shoe factory."



"Eight months later N. R. I. Employment Department sent me to Station KWCR as a Radio operator. Now I am Radio Engineer at Station WSUI. I am also connected with Television Station W9XK."



"N. R. I. Training took me out of a low-pay shoe factory job and put me into Radio at good pay. Radio is growing fast."

Find out today how I Train You at Home to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 25 Years

RADIO IS A YOUNG, growing field with a future, offering many good pay spare time and full time job opportunities. And you don't have to give up your present job to become a Radio Technician. I train you right at home in your spare time.

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Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and service men. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, Commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

Many Make $5, $10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your course I send plans and directions which have helped many make $200 to $500 a year in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my course in Radio and Television; shows many letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. OAK, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

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J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. OAK
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

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29x4.50-20	2.35	1.05
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28x4.75-19	2.45	1.25
29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.26
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75
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32x4	2.95	1.25
32x4	2.95	1.25
33x4	3.25	1.35
32x4½	3.35	1.45

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34x5	4.25	2.25
32x6	7.95	2.95
36x6	9.95	4.45

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.75	$1.65
6.50-20	4.45	1.95
7.00-20	5.95	2.95

ALL OTHER SIZES

Size	Tires	Tubes
33x4½	$3.45	$1.45
34x4½	3.45	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.65
33x5	3.75	1.75
35x5	3.95	1.75

Size	Tires	Tubes
34x7	$10.95	$4.65
38x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	21.45	4.95
40x8	23.25	6.95

Size	Tires	Tubes
7.50-20	$6.95	$3.75
8.25-20	8.95	4.95
9.00-20	10.95	5.65
9.75-20	13.95	6.45

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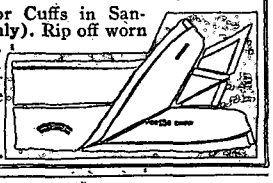

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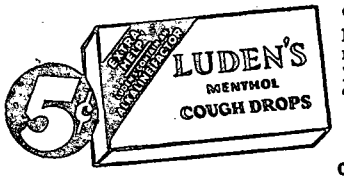

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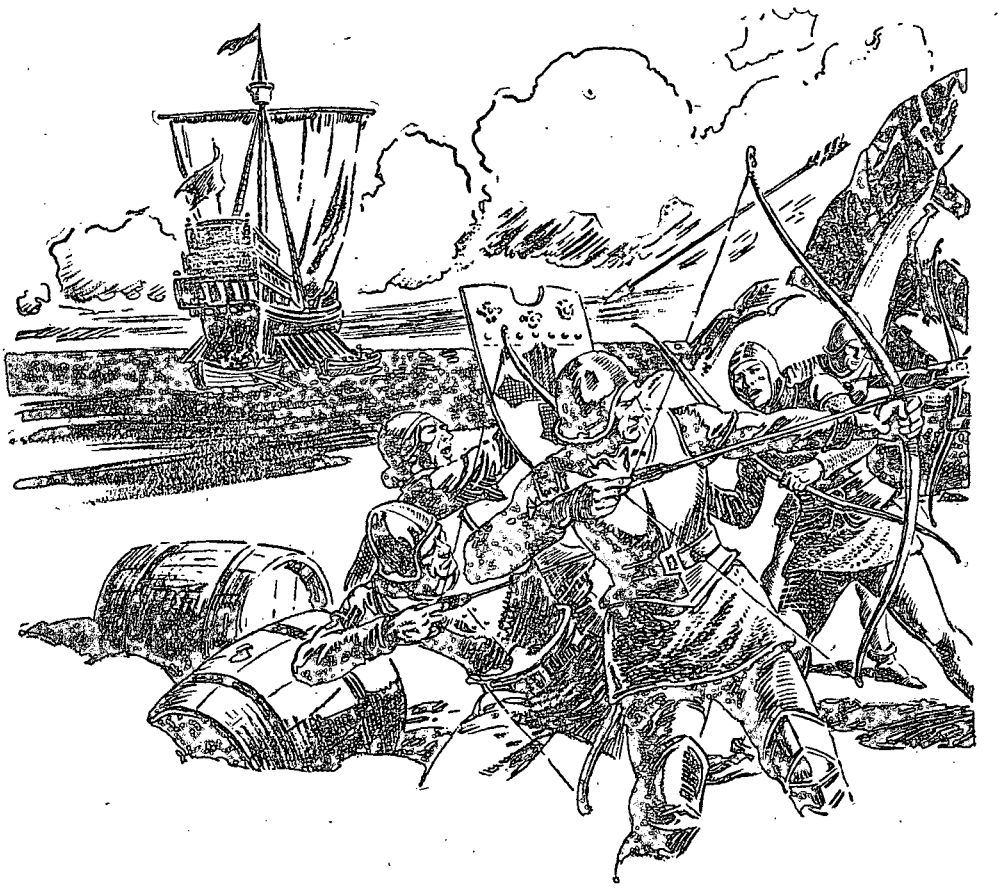

Archers to the Front

By ROY de S. HORN

Author of "Men with No Master," "Heathen Cargo," etc.

CHAPTER I

BOWMEN AND BOMBARDS

HORSES stamping, armor clanking, shields rattling and lances ringing —it was as if the whole countryside had been sowed with dragons' teeth and now was springing up in armed men. From every highway and crossroad, from every village and forest path they poured. Until the Southampton road was clogged with knights and men-at-arms, and archers from the King's forests jostled elbows with pikemen and even with barelegged "stabbers" from Ireland and Wales.

Not since the Crusades had Merrie England seen such levies as these that Edward III was assembling to war on his cousin Philippe of France.

But in the six heavy carts fighting for a way through the press on the road, there was one at least who had no eye for the brave display. Perched on the head cart, Wat the Armorer scowled and spat.

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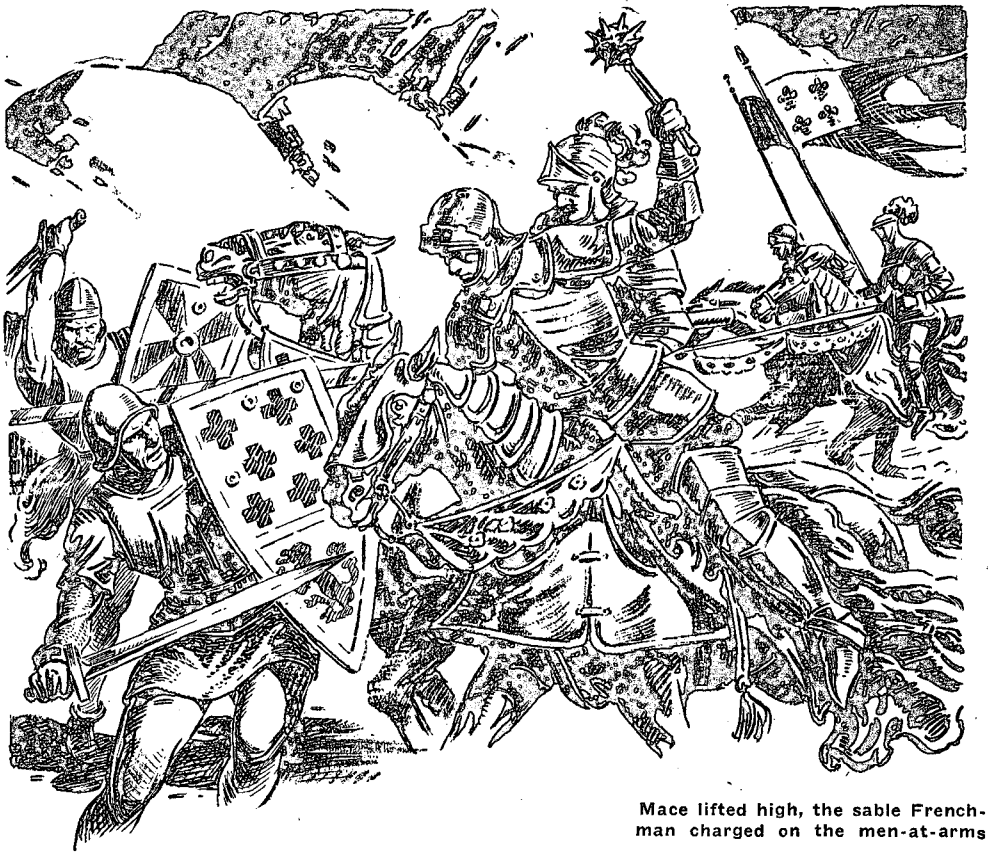

Mace lifted high, the sable Frenchman charged on the men-at-arms

Knights, don the casque, belt on the long sword; and seize the bowstaves, fill the quivers full, you forest men! Tomorrow you cross the Channel, to battle for a hundred years against our cousin of France. A Short Novel of Robin the bombardier

" 'Tis a fools war! If the Frenchmen were invading England, it would be reason enough to fight. But what business have we English in France that we must e'en cross the water to settle it with sword and ax?"

"Business enough, old Woods-boar!" answered Red Hubert, shifting his giant body to easier position in the cart. "The Frenchmen have stolen our own King's rightful province of Normandy. And now they would steal Guienne as well. If we scotch them not, they will steal all England next." He nudged the archer next to him. "Eh, old Wolf?"

John the Wolf, gaunt and grizzled, paused to squint down the arrow shaft he was scraping before replying. "Normandy I cannot eat, and this Guienne sounds no better. But if these Frenchmen have jewels and gold and rich velvets for the taking, as Sir Allan Mayne hath told us, it is business enough for me."

"Then you had better stayed with Sir Allan's archers than with these devil's bombards, if it is pillage and loot you have in mind, Wolf John," said the slender youth perched on the thick metal tube in center of the cart. "When these bombards begin to belch their brimstone and iron

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upon the Frenchmen, they will fly so fast that there will be none left for ransom!"

"And that, Peter Joy," remarked the giant Hubert, chuckling, "is well said. We bombardiers will breach the walls, and the archers will get the pillage and the loot."

"Nay," snorted the armorer sourly. "The blows and the loot will be divided as always. The barons and the knights will get the gold, and we commen men the blows!"

"Then why did you so sweetly give up the leading of the forest men to serve these same bombards, old Woods-boar?" demanded Red Hubert.

"Because," said Wat crisply, "if these bombards and devil's powders can overthrow knights in armor, then there may come a time when the division will be the other way around—we honest freeborn men will take the gold and the Devil will take the knights!"

"And the gibbet will take thee if thy tongue continues to wag with any baron nigh to hear," said John the Wolf. "And here comes the Butcher de Brenn now—a murrain upon him!"

CLATTERING down the road at the head of a score of men-at-arms rode a dark hawk-faced man in full armor, the quarterings of his shield and the fluttering banner on his squire's lance marking him a full baron. With the flats of their swords his men beat a pathway through the press on the road, and dark looks and muttered curses followed them.

"If I had had my stave strung and a good shaft notched, I would well have loved to test that same armor of his," growled John the Wolf, glaring after the baron.

"Nay, even a full-drawn shaft would not pierce a well-made hauberk." It was a new voice that broke in, and with the words the speaker was in the cart at a single bound, regardless of the sword and bossed shield he wore. "Have I not told thee, John, that naught less than a half-pound quarrel, full barbed, and hurled from a crossbow with double staves and pull, would do such work?"

The newcomer was a youth of not more than Peter Joy's own twenty years, but his forehead was high and his eyes deep and thoughtful. However, the smile that crinkled his lips was boyish. "How now, Wat—are the bombards well lashed and riding well?"

"Better than seasonably well, Robin," answered the armorer. "But our fat Flanders merchant has been running back and forth from cart to cart like a hen with one chick, asking now about the serpentine and now about the balls, when it is not the bombards he is weeping over!"

Red Hubert grinned. "Well it is, then, that our merchant hath engaged such stout bombardiers as Robin and John and Peter and myself, to tend them in the wars if here on a peaceful road he takes so much unease."

"Peaceful?" jeered Peter Joy. "There would have been naught of peace to it, if John Wolf had had his longbow strung and arrow to hand, when Butcher de Brenn rode by. John cannot forget the forest warden's deer he has poached, or that the warden still hath a gibbet over-hungry for him."

"It will be different," growled John the Wolf, "when we are in France. Let the Butcher ride bare of back but once, then—"

He hushed, for all at once the cart rounded a curve and come into full sight of Southampton Water. And the sight there was enough to stop any man's mouth full open.

From Romney Marsh all the way to the Test estuary, the harbor was a mass of shipping. Craft of all size lay there at anchor or tied up to the new-built wharves. Sails fluttered and yards and cordage creaked as sailors ran about like squirrels on the decks. Small boats plied the harbor like skimming bugs.

For over a thousand ships were assembled here, levied from the Cinque Ports all the way to London. On those already loaded, pennons and banners flew, to show what knights or barons held their stations there. Others were still receiving their

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loads of casks and beeves, war horses and supplies, as well as pikemen and archers, men-at-arms and knights in full armor.

Into this jostle and hubbub the cart forced its way, the other five carts creaking after. And to their inquiries as to where the *Falcon* lay, sweating sailors paused to wave and shout: "Further down. The white cog with the black poop castle. You cannot miss it!"

Then they came to a white ship with great crossed yard and black stern castle, and Wat drew the horses to a stop. "Is this the *Falcon?*"

A huge, ruddy man with flaxen hair, and bare-bodied save for doublet and sandals, ceased bawling to his sailors long enough to answer. "Aye, the *Falcon* it is. And I am Shipmaster Swann of the *Falcon* myself. But this ship is ordered for the King's artillery and not for carters. So get thee hence!"

Robin leaped out, stretched his long legs. "Then this is the ship we seek. For this is the King's artillery in these carts, and I am Robin Santerre, master artilleryman."

STRIDING to the cart, however, the brawny shipmaster jerked the canvas aside. Then at sight of naught but the long, round metal tubes, he let out a roar. "Artillery? Think you I know not a catapult when I see one? More likely bells for some abbey carillon, these—so take them hence, and speedily, or we will dump them into the water. And thee along with them, young cockerel!"

"None the less these are the king's artillery," retorted Robin, his lips tightening. "One bombard such as these will outmatch a whole shipload of catapults, or I will eat thy *Falcon* cog, sails and all! Now, call thy sailors that we may be at the loading!"

But still the cog's captain stood blinking and scowling. "The King's artillery I have order to load—and naught but the King's artillery will I load! So get thee hence with thy cart and bells before I lose temper and souse you e'en as I said."

He made as if to lay hand on Robin. But at his first move, out of the cart thrust a great freckled hand almost like a ham for size and brownness. It reached for the sailor's yellow mop of hair and jerked. And to his utter amaze the ship captain, large as he was, found himself lifted in air till only his toes dragged earth. Red Hubert, holding him thus helpless, raised himself over the cart side until the whole of his huge body had unfolded itself, joint by joint.

"Souse a bombardier, will ye—and our captain at that?" Hubert turned an inquiring face toward Robin. "Say but the word, and we will give this shipmaster a long drink of his own muddy water, and then load the cog ourselves. Ho, John—Peter! Out of the cart—and fetch thy staves with thee!"

Out scrambled John the Wolf and Peter Joy, their five-foot bowstaves stout gripped and the eagerness for brawling in their faces. Shipmaster Swann gaped wide at them.

"Nay, I want no bowstaves cracked across my pate. Artillery it is—whatever name ye choose to call it." Then, staring at Hubert's mighty frame, he shook his head incredulously. "Never have I felt such a clutch, nor thought to feel such, until Gog and Magog returned to earth!"

"Then will you please unload our carts into your cog?" demanded Robin sharply.

"Methinks I have but little choice." Suddenly the shipmaster began to grin. "I have a pilot—an overbearing man, and quarrelsome. A full butt of ale will I give thee, Red-thatch, if thou wilt draw him into a bicker and use that same strength on his noggin!"

Red Hubert's eyes sparkled. "For a half butt—a single pot—even for no ale at all, I am your man. Where waits this pilot who loves to bicker?"

Hurriedly, however, Robin drew him back. "This is no time for brawls. We have the bombards to load aboard, and many casks and sacks."

At the bawl of the shipmaster, many sailors came running, to lay stout timbers

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and lead out thick blocks and ropes. The archers were amazed then, as, with deft hitches of ropes and tackle rove through a great block on the crossyard above, the casks and bags and even the heavy bombards themselves were started aboard.

In the midst of this such a sudden hubbub arose along the quay that sailors and archers turned to look.

Adown the quay tramped a dozen stout men in half-armor, with a mounted knight at their head. The soldiers were burly men, with weathered faces and steel caps and shields well dented from stout use. The knight, however, wore burnished new mail, and his clean-shaven face looked out pleasantly from beneath his raised visor. Even Sir Allan's warhorse, almost as well shielded as his rider under its flowing trappings of leather and steel, seemed to prance with eagerness.

BUT it was the serried men tramping ten abreast behind the knight and soldier who drew the eyes and the shouts of the townsmen lining the quay. Clad in leather jerkins, steel caps gleaming, bull-hide shields rattling against the quivers at their backs, and their long bowstaves in their hands, the archers came on, rank by rank. And as they marched they roared out in full-throated chorus the song of the men of the forest:

The King he has his royal throne,
The earl his donjon keep;
The abbey monk he counts his beads
Thrice nightly in his sleep!
But the forest men, the forest men,
They need no castle wall,
They would not change their green roof-trees
With any man at all!

So bend the bow, and loose the shaft!
And let the red deer fall!
The forest men they would not change
With any man at all!

The shipmaster stared. "Verily, they have been at heady ale, these forest men. For less than such a song have men swung high afore now. Let but the King hear such words—"

"And well deserving of the King's gibbet!" broke in a rasping voice behind them. "Aye, drawn and quartered, if they burn not at the stake!"

He of the rasping voice was large, brawny-muscled, and wore sailor's garb, but his black-browed countenance was darker than any sailor's around. His full lips were twisted back, and arrogance rode his harsh words.

Robin swept him with a quick glance, sensing that this was that same pilot of whom Master Swann had spoken as a quarrelsome man.

"That may be, but there will be many King's men sore handled in the doing," he said tartly. "For these are the Masterless Men of the New Forest. And as to the hanging or burning, the prince—our own Prince Edward of Woodstock—may have some little word to say. Since it is by his own command they come, full-pardoned of all crime, for his own royal rescue some days since when he was beset by traitors in the town of Bewly."

The pilot at that gave him a dark glance, and bit his lips. But the Masterless Men were now swinging past and dividing up among the ships that lay along the quay. Shields and quivers rattling, voices yelping, they poured over gangplanks and onto decks until the ships seemed packed with their green and gray.

Sir Allan Mayne, with his dozen men-at-arms and a round score of the archers, came toward the *Falcon* cog. At the swaying gangplank and the smell and sight of the lapping underneath, the black warhorse held back, snorting and champing. But at the touch of the rider's golden spurs, he surged ahead and trampled the gangway with ringing hoofs. Behind him poured the men-at-arms and archers.

"Ho, Robin!" called Sir Allan, swinging down from the saddle as he reached the deck and sighted him. "The bombards and powder and balls—you have them aboard?"

"They are—or will be ere nones-time," answerd Robin. "We had not thought to have the pleasure of your company too."

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"Perhaps the pleasure will not be all sweet," said the knight, laughing, "for the Lord Warden of Bewly—Baron Hugo de Brenn—will also be here shortly, to have full command of all the fighting men." He swung about. "Ho, Shipmaster. See to this horse of mine, that he has a dry stall and grain in plenty. And also make place for Sir Hugo de Brenn when he boards the ship."

At that Robin frowned, and John the Wolf muttered under his breath. But Red Hubert was too busy swapping great clouts o' the back with the burly leader of the men-at-arms.

"Jarold, thou wine-guzzling stealer of villains' sheep! Is not risk of drowning in this tub of a cog enough ill-chance I must suffer, without thee along to make the Devil's welcome double-sure?"

"Hubert, is it thee, thou great ox?" retorted the soldier, grinning. "Better a sheep-napper than a woods-running poacher from the King's forest!"

"If there be woods in France, we may-hap shall see who does the running—whether it be soldiers or forest men," replied Hubert. "Eh, Tyrel?" And he grinned at the long-shanked leader of the score of archers who had come aboard.

But now Robin was anxious to be at the unloading of the carts again, and even Sir Allan Mayne stamped the deck impatiently.

"Tyrel, put thy archers at the hoisting ropes, and Jarold, do thou the same with thy soldiers of Kent," he ordered. "Ho, Shipmaster! Can make no more haste with these bombards?"

Shipmaster Swann shrugged his shoulders. "If the tackle fails, that bombard will make all too much haste into the hold. It is a heavy thing, and might well burst the cog's timbers if it fall."

However, he took his stand on the forecastle and from there drove the sweating sailors to speed.

All this time the black-browed pilot had stood idle, scowling at the incoming casks and sacks. Sir Allan Mayne touched his shoulder.

"This is no time for idleness. Set thy brawny shoulder to yon cask."

The pilot drew back. "I am no soldier. I am Pierre the pilot. I have naught to do with the ship save under oar or sail."

"Pilot or no, you shall set hand to this loading or else taste the flat of a blade!" snapped the knight fiercely. "If you be no common sailor, then into the hold with you and see to the storing of the artillery that it may not come a-loose to the damage of the ship or the horses!" And Sir Allan's eyes gleamed so hotly that the pilot hurried to turn and descend to the hold out of reach of that heavy Norman sword.

"And, pilot—see to it that the casks and sacks be set in a dry place and away from bottom-water or leakage!" called Robin after him.

SWIFTLY now the first of the bombards swung aboard amid lusty grunting of the men at the ropes, and after it the remainder of the casks and sacks containing the powder and ball. From the hindmost cart stepped two figures, who also crossed over the gangplank.

The first was a white-headed, fat-bellied man in the robe of a merchant, his puckered eyes flickering with nervousness as he felt the swaying of the ship. The second, black-haired and red-lipped, was a girl of scarce sixteen. Her small feet were quick on the planking and her eyes sparkling at the sights around.

The paunchy man was Jacob Algelt, the Flemish merchant and owner of these strange new bombards which he had leased to King Edward for his artillery. And the girl was Katherine, his daughter.

"Strange fighting this French war must be, with women going to the affray," grumbled John the Wolf as the girl stepped lightly aboard.

"Nay," said Red Hubert alongside, "the Queen herself and her ladies of the royal court will follow soon, as quick as seasonable place may be readied for them. There will be camps as well as fighting, old Wolf. And the girl has knowledge of

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this Devil's powder greater even than any save her father and our own Robin."

Sir Allan had stepped to meet them. "The half of the after cabin is curtained off and ready for your use. It is cramped and ill-smelling for a lady, but the crossing should not take long."

Robin Santerre himself stood as if his tongue were tied, even though the girl's shoulder all but touched in the passing. But as her dark eyes threw him a smiling glance, his face reddened and he turned to shout needless commands to the archers who were already straining their utmost.

Wat the Armorer chuckled. "More fright has he of this maiden's eyes than of all the Frenchmen in France. A pot of ale against thy bowstave, Wolf John, that he would not change that one smile from her for all the French ransom you are already counting as in your pouch!"

"Let him keep the smiles, and I will choose the ransom!" replied John the Wolf, growling. "What said Sir Allan—a hundred livres for a simple knight and five hundred for a baron of full quartering?"

"Aye, but why wait to get to France?" gibed Peter Joy. "Here comes your baron e'en now, and easy into your hands for the taking!"

John the Wolf and Red Hubert both cursed beneath their breath as the hawk-faced man of the morning's passage on the road spurred his clanking warhorse aboard. For as Lord Warden of the New Forest Baron de Brenn had little love for the forest men, nor they any at all for him. Too oft had they seen their own fellows swinging from the warden's gibbets as poachers, which hard usage they repaid by notching the thumbs of the warden's own foresters so often as they caught them.

Hence there were sly grins and chuckles aboard as the baron's warhorse plunged, wide-eyed, at the swaying gangplank, almost to the unseating of its rider. With a Norman oath the baron sank his spurs deep and so came aboard at a run. His eighty pounds of full armor clanked as he swung scowling down to the half-deck planks. One of the men-at-arms led the caparisoned warhorse below, while Sir Allan greeted the baron and passed with him to the quarters in the stern castle.

CHAPTER II

CRY PILLAGE

BUT when Sir Allan returned alone shortly after, his lips were tight and his brows black. He said nothing, however, even when the pilot, Pierre, went into the stern castle. Nor when, upon his return, the pilot took over the command of the loading on deck, while Shipmaster Swann was sent to take charge of the stowage in the hold.

But Wat the Armorer, who had scant bridle to his tongue, was not slow to speak. "It is a poor leader who so soon changes the orders of his under-officer. Sir Allan's glowers would fire that stern-castle and burn Butcher de Brenn with it, if looks could burn."

If it had been de Brenn's intent to speed the loading, the results were all amiss. For under the pilot, all the leading gear and tackle seemed to come a-snarl. Stout hempen ropes parted, the crossyard hoist went adrift, and thrice the great tackle block on its end jammed its running parts in its cheeks. Three full carts and two of the bombards had been loaded before noon under Master Swann, but the last cart and its bombard still waited unloaded on the quay when dusk began to fall.

At the third jamming of the yardarm block even Robin Santerre bit his lips. Red Hubert swore and looked toward the pilot so fiercely that instead of sending a sailor up to clear the tackle, as on previous occasions, the pilot himself laid hasty hands to the rigging and clambered aloft.

"I had thought these sailors with their ropes and lifts were exceeding clever, until now," growled Wat the Armorer. "But we had done this loading quicker if we had put an hundred stout archers to the burdens and hoisted them aboard by main strength."

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Robin shook his head. "It is not the fault of the tackle, nor yet of the rope. According to the principle of levers and forces which I studied as laid down at Oxford in the book of Roger the Monk, a rope thrice run through double blocks increases a man's strength by six. It is the poor ordering of the tackle blocks that caused the rope to break."

"Then let me throw this interfering pilot overboard and bring back the shipmaster to attend the loading," said Red Hubert testily. "Else we will not be finished by curfew."

But Robin only shook his head and went below impatiently to examine his precious sacks and casks for the sixth time.

It was Shipmaster Swann, swearing in a darkened corner of the hold, that took him that way.

"The bottom-leakage—that lazy pilot hath not laid the planks above it and the cargo on that at all, as I bade him! See—he laid the casks and sacks right against the bottom planks themselves!"

Running his hands down because he could not see in the gloom, Robin felt the dampness of stinking water.

"A leak? You mean the cog leaks?" he demanded sharply.

"Nay, no more than any boat leaks," said the shipmaster. "Always does a boat take some water in the bottom, which we must bucket out when it grows too great. Which is why we lay these great planks against the bottom ribs themselves to make a dry platform for the cargo above. But here are the planks unlaid, and at least a good part of thy sacks and casks soaked in the bottom water itself. Is there aught in them that will harm from the leakage?"

"No more harm than perhaps a complete waste of all this artillery," said Robin bitterly. "Bombards are not catapults whose timbers work whether wet or dry. The balls have no hurt, for they are of stone and iron. But the serpentine—the brimstone and sulphur and charcoal that are the compounds of the powder—it will be useless until it is throughout dried. And I know not how strongly it will take fire even when dried."

While the shipmaster called to some of the soldiers to make haste and shift the wetted cargo into dryer place, Robin started to clamber out of the hold to have word with the pilot.

And then suddenly—

It was the squealing of the tackle-block overhead, the singing hum of overtaut hemp, as much as Hubert's shout that made him look up.

Almost directly over him, dangling from the cocked yardarm, hung the third and last of the great bombards. It was lurching and dipping, swinging wildly from side to side. From the block itself, far above, came a sudden straining crack. Then rope and block and all, the bombard broke loose and came plunging its full ten hundred-weight of metal into the hold.

WILDLY Robin threw himself back and sideways. And even as he leaped from under, he felt the air-rush as the plunging bombard hurtled past. It struck a cross-brace timber, smashed through the stout oak as if it were mere wheat straw, struck an already stowed bombard with a deafening ring of metal, half spun and buried itself with a dull thud against the layer of bags beyond.

His face white and eyes gleaming, and with nerves still a-quiver from that close brush of death, Robin leaped for the short ladderway to the half-deck above. He scrambled out onto the open deck almost at the feet of the dark-faced pilot who took one look at his blazing eyes and stumbled back.

"The lifting block—it broke from the yard!" he cried. "The rope was rotten; there was naught I could do!"

"There was naught you could do to keep the sacks out of the bottom water, either, except to lay the dry timbers underneath as you had order," said Robin tensely. He turned his head. "Peter Joy, do you scramble up this mast and fetch down the parted tackle rope that still hangs to the yard. Mayhap we may find a knife-cut

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there, rather than only the fraying strands of outworn hemp!"

Peter Joy laid quick hands to the mast. But before he could even begin his climb, the pilot let out a great oath in Norman French. His hand whipped to his girdle, rose again. And the keen edge of the snatched knife stabbed with deadly intent at Robin's breast.

Robin, however, had turned his head aside, but not his eyes. He glimpsed the quick movement, the raised hand. And that hand, falling, found not unresisting flesh but the quick, hard grasp of Robin's own hand. With the pilot's wrist firm clutched, Robin took a half turn, jerked, and the knife went spinning out and into the hold below.

Amazed, the pilot jerked loose, glared. Then with a bellow like a bull he threw his brawny body forward in a charge, seeking to hurl the slender bombardier over the side and into the swirling tide beneath.

But almost in mid-air the pilot seemed to take wing and fly away. Red Hubert, moving with incredible speed for one so huge, had seized the pilot's jerkin in his enormous fist. And Hubert's strength, not applied directly, merely added force and direction to the pilot's plunge. Up, head-high, and on over the cog's side the pilot spun, to land with a half-choked shout full ten feet beyond the cog's fat sides. And with the splash came Hubert's joyful shout.

"Thy ale, Shipmaster Swann! Fetch thy promised butt of ale! For this bickering brawler of thine is gone overside to show these salt-water fishes how to swim!"

Worriedly Robin hastened to the side. But the pilot, sputtering and cursing, had already come up from his unexpected dive and was swimming strongly toward the quay. There he found helping hands and vanished into the crowd.

"The ale is thine, Red-thatch, and double-ale, not small beer!" answered the shipmaster, panting from his climb to the deck. "But it was not full earned, since I was not there to see."

ROBIN, however, sent the shipmaster scurrying again with order to hoist all the wet casks and sacks up on deck again for drying, and to lash the fallen bombard in place. Then as he himself turned to look toward the quay again, he was surprised to feel the touch of fingers on his arm.

It was the Flemish girl, Katherine Algelt.

"It—it almost struck you!" she said, gasping. "I saw it—saw it fall! It would have ground you like a crushed fly had you been underneath."

"An old and rotten rope and a lucky leap in time," answered Robin. He felt a wave of warmth flow to his very ear tips—a warmth that was both pleasant and confusing. The blackness of her eyes was even more dizzying. And so, because he was young and had no knowledge of women, he stammered and gulped his words, "This Norman-speaking pilot, though—he is very careless in his loading. Half the charcoal and serpentine is wetted—"

"If they had talked with good English tongue, instead of swinish Norman French," said John the Wolf behind them sourly, "mayhap we would know what lies behind this all. For I stood outside the after-castle door when the pilot went in to talk to Butcher de Brenn, and for half the length of an abbot's vespers their words came through the door. But their gulping Norman was too strange for my honest Saxon ears."

"The pilot's name—Pierre—it is Norman, too," said Robin thoughtfully. "However, inasmuch as he is a pilot and needs must know the landmarks of the shores, both English and French, it is but reason that he knows the speech too."

"De Brenn—de Brenn—" the girl was repeating the name wonderingly. "It seems to me that I have heard that name before. But in Normandy, not England. At the market fair in Cherbourg; my father had business with the mercers there. And there was a Comte de Brenne who held a barony there. I recall it because he

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amerced us for thrice the tax that was the usual custom."

"It is not strange," said Robin carelessly. "Half the barons in England have holdings in France as well, held from their grandfathers and great-grandfathers before them. Our own King Edward did homage to his uncle, the King of France, for his Duchy of Aguitaine. This Comte de Brenne of Cherbourg might well be cousin or even closer kin to our English Baron de Brenn, and yet be full Frenchman in all else."

"Then why do not these testy cousins do their own bickering, instead of levying honest English archers and franklins into their wars?" grunted Wat the Armorer.

"Pillage! For the good sake of pillage!" retorted John the Wolf. "If we pillage our own lords here, it is the gibbet and the stake. Whereas to pillage a Frenchman is a praiseworthy thing. I care naught for the rights of the quarrel, so long as I can but lay hand on some rich Frenchman to hold to ransom!"

CHAPTER III

NOBLE BANNERS FLYING

WITH the coming of dusk, and the last of the cart loads aboard the cog, most of the archers and sailors had taken themselves ashore again to sleep. The girl had returned to her father in the stern-castle. The armorer, with Hubert and Peter Joy and John the Wolf, ate cold loaves and venison from their pouches, and stretched themselves as best they could on the cog's deck. What sailors remained to watch the ship were warming their meat over a tiny charcoal brazier they had set up on deck, having thoroughly sprinkled the deck planks with water to guard against scattering coals.

Standing on the raised forecastle, Robin Santerre gazed about him at the vast cluttering of ships and the bivouac fires ashore, and wondered.

It was strange that he, who had no liking for either war or bloodshed, should be embarked to sail to war on the morrow. As a student at Oxford, he had found more interest in the study of levers and weights and forces than in the martial application of them. The smelting of iron with charcoal to make the fine steel was more important than the hacking of other men's necks with that same steel.

Then in a yellowed parchment of the Franciscan monk, Roger Bacon, he had run across that intriguing formula for the compounding of this strange mixture called "serpentine"—gun powder. Neither the old monk nor Robin, at first, had known that it was gunpowder, or that men would fashion great bombards of metal from which to shoot balls of stone and iron with that same powder.

Robin had learned that only when this Flanders merchant with his pretty daughter had come with these bombards wrought in Flanders, to hire this amazing new species of artillery to King Edward for his wars in France.

It was the thought that here was a new and greater force to be harnessed than man had ever possessed before, that had caught Robin's interest, brought him here. That, and perhaps the equally amazing force that lay in the Flemish girl's sparkling eyes . . .

Equally powerful, and yet in Robin's mind perhaps even more praiseworthy than his own motives, was the reason that had brought Wat the Armorer in company with him. Perhaps the master armorer of all England, Wat had ceased the making of hauberks and helms because only the barons and knights were rich enough to purchase them. And protected by those same hauberks and helms, the barons and knights over-rode all ordinary Englishmen, taking what they would and paying as oft in blows as in coin.

But seeing the power of those new bombards, Wat the Armorer had recognized that there might be a force sufficient to overcome the vast advantage that arrow-proof armor gave. The new engine of war would make a freeborn archer as good as a king. And so, at an age when

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ordinary men dropped sword or hammer to sit in the sun and play with their grandchildren, Wat the Armorer had joined Robin's little group to serve the bombards. Had joined that he might see the proof in bloody war, that these new engines were as he had hoped.

THE thudding of hooves below as Sir Allan's mettlesome charger impatiently kicked at his stall recalled Robin from his mood. He went over to where the drenched bags had been laid for drying. Running his hand into the nearest, he took out a handful of the lumped grains.

Laying a pinch on a dry timber, he picked up a coal from the sailors' brazier. The powder was lifeless. Only a little spot where the grains had not soaked through sputtered for a moment.

With sudden thought, Robin bent to the sack, drew some from the side where the late sun had struck. This burned better. But it was a small raveling from the hempen sack, which had become mixed with the grains, that seized Robin's attention. The hemp, impregnated with the powder, did not leap to flaring flame; neither did it hang fire and smolder slowly as ordinary cordage would char. Instead, a sputtering, sizzling spark ran slowly but measuredly along the hempen strand and yet could not be extinguished easily.

With eyes sparkling Robin twisted another strand from the sack, then another. Hubert and the other bombardiers were around him now, watching interestedly. A couple of the sailors had come up to stare at the strange hissing spark.

All the weariness from the day's toil had gone from Robin now. His breath came quick, his face was eager. He cast a swift look about him.

On the deck a few feet away lay a discarded wine flask, emptied and dropped there by the archers after their meal. The wine fumes were heavy, but the pottery flask was dry.

Taking it up, Robin hurried below, filled it with a double handful of powder from the dry sacks in the hold. Then he returned to the deck and the brazier.

With nervous hands he twisted another powder-granulated strand from the hempen sack. Thrusting the strand into the powder in the flask until only the end protruded, he glanced about again. A gnawed half loaf of bread lay where the flask had been discarded. Tearing a handful out of the softer part inside the crust, he crushed it into a tight ball, pressed it into the flask neck and around the hempen strand.

He held the flask before him.

Red Hubert chuckled. "Think you to fashion bombards out of pottery clay, Robin? Even a small blow with a sword would shatter the flask to bits."

"That," said Robin, "is something I must prove."

Holding the flask in his hand, he thrust the end of the strand against the brazier coals until it began to hiss and spit. Then he raced as far forward along the ship's deck as he could go, laid the smoking flask down, and raced back. He had scarcely reached the others around the brazier again when there came such a rattling crash that the horses below snorted and plunged with fright.

With that roar the flask had shattered like a meteor bursting in the night. The flaring flame lighted the deck and masts, the gaping eyes and mouths of the men. Bits of flying shard rattled as they struck, and Red Hubert cried out and clapped a hand to his thigh. Then the night's blackness curtained down again, and there was only the stink of acrid smoke.

"A murrain on that devil's powder!" roared Hubert. He took his hand away from his thigh, held it to the brazier glow. "Blood! I have been scotched even through this stout leather jerkin. Did I not say it would shatter—that clay would fashion no bombards?"

"But it shattered! It shattered, and with cutting force!" said Robin, panting. "It was not bombards I had mind to—no, not bombards!"

"The more I see of this mixture, the

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more certain I am that it is devil's doing," rumbled Hubert. "Had you held it in your hand, had you fired it closer—our hides had all been as full of clay shards as a target butt full of arrows!"

By now feet were running along the quays; voices shouted, sailors called from ship to ship. Even Sir Allan and Baron de Brenn and the girl came dashing out to inquire.

"What hell's noise is this?" demanded de Brenn angrily. "Sir Allan, have you no order over these sailors that they make disturbance to wake the dead?"

"It was but the powder sacks—the powder for the bombards," said Robin cunningly. "It was wetted by mischance, and I but tested a handful with a coal to see if it were dry. I am sorry if I have waked thee—"

"Then see to it that it happens no more!" snapped the baron and, turning, he stamped to his quarters again.

But Sir Allan looked sharply at Robin. "It was no noise of loose powder burning; it was more like the blast of a loosed bombard itself."

"Yet it was no bombard. The bombards are all stout-lashed in the hold," returned Robin, and explained no further.

But he walked forward, gathered such shards of the shattered flask as he could find, touched with his hands the splintered planks where the flask had exploded. He held the shards for a long time, staring unseeingly over the water.

This night meant much to him.

And now the bell in the great tower of Southampton Hall began to ring the *couvre-feu*. From the rambling town came the calls of the watchmen: "Cover your fires! Cover your fires!" A bellowing horn on the largest ship took up the curfew call, and from ship to ship adown the line the other horns sounded.

From the brazier the sailors plucked a few coals aside and quickly covered them with ashes, to save the fire for the morrow. The rest of the brazier's embers were dumped over the side. Finally the King's great fleet lay in silence.

STANDING on the cog's forecastle in the bright sunlight of the following morning, Robin Santerre thought never to see a more stirring sight. From every mast and staff fluttered the bright pennons and banners of the warriors of England; steel glittered and sparkled on every deck. Sir Allan Mayne came and stood beside him; the knight read off the 'scutcheons as a monk tells his beads.

"Gold, a chevron gules—see the red chevron on the gold field? The Earl of Stafford keeps that ship. And there is the Earl of Warwick with his fess and six crosslets of gold. The lions of Arundel, the chevrons and ermine of Oxford. Never has there been such a brave gathering in all England. And look upon the devices: the swan of Bohun, the blue boar of Vere, the griffon of the Montagues, the horseshoes of Ferrers!"

Wat the Armorer, who had come up to douse his grizzled head in water, gave a grunt. "A brave show, mayhap, but a flaunting one. Must a man then make a display of silken flags and painted shields to prove himself a true-blooded knight or baron?"

"Nay," said Sir Allan. "The banner or shield is intended to mark the rallying point in battle, by which the men-at-arms may know the whereabouts of their leader. And by the same token, if a knight be craven, his arms will be seen fleeing to the rear and recognized as such to his everlasting shame."

The armorer glowered at the great banner of Baron de Brenn fluttering its scarlet and sable overhead. "Then for the nonce we on this ship have naught to fear. For pigs have no zest for fight, and the boar's head on yon banner is a fitting device for a Butcher!"

A soft voice broke in, pleasant but eager. Katherine Algelt stood there, gazing about with flushed cheeks and glowing eyes.

"But that golden shield on that galley there, with the solitary wedge device of simple red adown its length. Whose would that plain shield be? And see—the banner

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at the mast has only the head of a blackamoor upon it."

Sir Allan looked, and his voice became soft and reverent. "Wherever those are seen on the fields of France, there will rage the hottest of the battle. For the Saracen head banner and the gold shield with the pile gules are those of Sir John Chandos, and there is no braver man in all Christendom. Only a simple knight he is, even as myself. Yet, had he wished, he could have had ten thousand of the bravest in all England under his banner."

"More even than a baron or an earl?" inquired Wat the Armorer.

"More than even the greatest belted earl in the land—more even than the Earl of Warwick himself."

"Then," said Wat the Armorer, "mayhap there is somewhat to this arms and banner flaunting after all, when a simple knight has greater honor than a belted earl. . . . But, look to this cog next to us. Is not that a ballista they are lashing upon the forecastle there?"

Robin Santerre looked, and nodded.

UPON the high forecastle of the adjoining ship men were rearing and securing in position the great timbers and spoon beam of a ballista. From rail to rail they lashed the foundation timbers, and fastened other hawsers to mast and bow.

Then they laid shoulder to the stout windlass bars and tugged. Foot by foot the huge spoon beam came over and back in its arc, and the twisted ropes creaked and groaned under the strain.

Presently the master artilleryman tripped the trigger, and the great beam whipped around and up until it brought up sharp in its checks. The whole ballista rocked and rattled, and the stout cog itself quivered and reeled in the water.

"Do they think to drag cog and all overland to the battle, or do they think to match yon ship against a sea barbican in France?" scoffed the armorer.

"Not against walls, but against some ship of the Frenchmen if they come to meet us in the Manche," replied Sir Allan. "One great stone from that ballista, fair thrown, would shatter a ship's timbers like an eggshell."

"And one of our bombards would make eggshells of both cog and ballista," said Wat the Armorer proudly. "Besides, the ballista must hurl its stone in a long oversweep which, if the Frenchman came close in, would overshoot and miss. But our bombard, since it shoots straight and true, would be even more potent at close distance."

"Then why not hoist one of our bombards up on our own forecastle?" demanded the girl.

Robin shook his head. "Yon ballista has long foundation timbers which spread its weight over great space. Our bombard is short of body and of great weight. We would need to cut and fit special timbers for the foundation, and mayhap other great posts of oak to strengthen the ship's timbers and deck underneath."

"Then the bombards are of no use save on land," said the armorer gloomily.

"Nay, I said not that. Given time, we could build such timbers as would withstand even the back-throw of the bombard. But there is no time. See, Shipmaster Swann is already come to the deck."

The shipmaster had indeed come onto the raised forecastle and was casting his glance about, both alow and aloft. But mostly it was the sea and the dark rim of the sky above the hilltops that held his gaze. And as he looked he shook his head.

"If the King comes not quickly now, he need make no haste at all," he said slowly. "That dark cloud, low and to the land. See how it gathers, how quickly it eats into the sunlight? Such clouds have I seen before; they bring with them such storm as no shipmaster would face if there be harbor for the seeking."

"Storm?" Sir Allan gave an impatient frown. "You think then that it will come to storm?"

"Aye—and quickly."

"But not too quickly, mayhap," said

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the girl, turning her head down the shore. "I think the King comes now."

Then along the road and through the town came the fanfare of trumpets, the winding of horns. Drums and tambors rumbled and rolled. And with them came the clanging tramp of feet and steel-shod hooves, until the whole town seemed to shake.

"The King!" exclaimed the shipmaster.

"And our own prince, Edward of Woodstock!" said Sir Allan Mayne.

CHAPTER IV

TO SEA—TO BATTLE

FOR at the head of the serried ranks of mounted knights and footmen of the London levies rode Edward the Third, King of England. He was a man of but thirty-three, tawny haired, and brawny of limb.

He bestrode a white jennet, his equerry behind him bearing his armor and another leading his caparisoned charger. Beside the King, and for once in full armor save for his doffed helmet, rode his son and heir, Edward of Woodstock, Prince of Wales, but whom some day men would best know as the Black Prince.

He was a slender youth, not yet sixteen, and his golden hair and fair skin made him appear boyish. Yet he reined his heavy warhorse as expertly as a veteran, and he had the soldier's carriage. Over and above the riders streamed the great royal standard, with its golden leopards on its scarlet field.

Even as those on the cog looked, the Earl of Warwick rode from under his own banner with its six golden crosses and spoke deferentially to the King, pointing toward the ever darkening sky. But the King shook his head and waved an imperious hand, and the array of steel continued to pour down the road and along the quays. The waiting ships seemed to swallow them up, so quickly did they pour into the cogs and galleys.

Even as the royal standard ran to the masthead on the King's ship, a great horn sounded, calling all the captains to council. But a little time later, when the horn sounded again for the breakup of the conference, it was the King's own ship that spread its sail and led the way to sea.

Then the whole harbor broke into motion, as far as the eye could see. Horns sounded and drums rolled, the air was full of the creaking of yards and cordage and the shouting of the sailors. The deep-laden cogs swung out their great sweeps, long oars manned each by a half-dozen men, to work out and clear to where the wind would belly the flapping sails.

Galleasses, with both oars and sail, slid slowly past the burdened cogs. But still swifter, the galleys with their long pointed bows and their myriad oars beating the water like hundred-legged bugs, skimmed past and away, their fore-and after-castles black with armed men and their waists sparkling with the glint of pointed steel.

Then from the people left behind on the quay came a great shout of farewell, so loud that it echoed even above the noise of ships and oars.

At the bellowing of Shipmaster Swann, the *Falcon* too had swung its nose, wallowing toward the open channel. Two great sweeps forward and two at the stern gave it help, and the grunts of the rowers came measured and loud. Beside the stern steering sweep the pilot, Pierre, hurled his Norman-French oaths at the sailors who tugged at it to steer.

"Ho, our butcher baron comes to add his voice," said Red Hubert, who had found place on the forecastle with Tyrel and his score of archers. He pointed aft to where Baron de Brenn stood beside the pilot.

The speedier ships had by now pulled out ahead and were skimming and churning their way toward the open water. The *Falcon* and the other cogs, fat-bellied, heavy laden, wallowed along in their wake.

Sir Allan gave a sudden cry. "Our pilot —he is heading away and to the east! Why does he not steer closer to the south, as do the others?"

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Indeed the *Falcon,* now that her great sail was taut and pulling, was drawing clear of the pack, and skirting more to the eastward.

"Mayhaps the pilot holds her clear, to avoid running other ships," said the armorer.

But Robin's brows were thoughtful. "Sea room is a good thing, and rocks are more deadly than neighboring ships. But it would suit me better if I knew our shipmaster's thoughts on it."

SHIPMASTER SWANN was even then clambering to the high forecastle. His face had a worried twist, and his eyes glanced from the straining sail to the ever increasing cloud. The cog was clear of the inner waters of the harbor now, and feeling the full force of the rousing breeze. White caps were slapping viciously at the wallowing hull, the mast and yard were creaking and groaning, and the whole northwest quarter of the heavens was a lowering black.

"Do we not head overfar to the east, and away from the main fleet?" inquired Sir Allan sharply. "It was my understanding that we were to follow the head ships."

"It suits me ill, too," answered the shipmaster. "The storm swells apace, and there is no safety on a rocky shore. But I have order only over the sailors. The setting of the course is in the hands of the pilot. And mayhap he hath his orders from the Baron de Brenn."

"You have spoken to him, then?" inquired Robin.

"Aye. And his answer was that he steers this course to avoid the mischance of striking rocks on the lee shore. And ahead and in that direction lies the Isle of Wight."

"But before the Isle of Wight comes the pass of the Solent, and a safe haven there if the storm grow too strong. Is that not true?" demanded Sir Allan.

"You speak sooth, yes. The Solent would give haven to the whole fleet if need arise, and there we could ride out even such a storm as seems in the making."

"But we draw over-far to the east, if we would seek shelter in the Solent, do we not? And if we miss the mouth of the Solent—"

"Then there is naught to do but seek safety in the open Channel, and stay wide of any shores as best we may. For a ship in storm there is safety only in two ways—a safe haven, or else the freedom of the open sea."

That the storm was waxing fast was already more evident by the moment. The wind against the great sail was pressing the cog far over, the hum of the cordage was like a rising wail. Spume from the crested waves was driving like pellets of rain.

Archers and soldiers, stout-hearted enough in battle or on the solid land, were staring at the vicious crests with white and anxious faces. From below came the plunging and snorting of the affrighted war-horses. The straining of the decks and timbers of the whole cog had become by now a tremendous rattling and creaking.

"Look!" suddenly cried the armorer. "The King's ship and the galleys in the van—they are turning. They are turning short to the west, with all effort!"

"The mouth of the Solent lies there!" answered the shipmaster. "The King has seen the fury of the storm. He is leading into the safety of the passage inside the Isle of Wight!"

"And now our pilot and de Brenn must needs follow also," said Sir Allan with relief. "They dare not disobey the King's orders in open sight."

True, after a moment the great steering sweep was put over, and tardily the cog began to turn her head westward.

But now the distance that the *Falcon* had worked away from the fleet and to the east became evident. With its single great square sail and its sluggish hull, the cog made but slow progress westward, but far faster progress southward. Already the steep rocks and headlands of

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the Isle of Wight were plain in sight, with the surf breaking white at their feet.

"Down! Down from the castles and the high points!" shouted the shipmaster to Tyrel and his archers. He bawled the same message to Jarold and his men-at-arms on the stern-castle. "Down into the ship's waist, lest she be topheavy and not take hold in the water as she should!"

"Would it not be better to send them as much as possible into the hold at the stern?" asked Robin. "It is the higher stern-castle that catches the wind and swings the bow ever away from the Solent mouth. A heavier weight underneath would increase the drag and thus make a balance of the force of wind and sea."

Shipmaster Swann looked his amazement. "How knew you this? I had thought you were but a man of land—not a sailor!"

"The laws of levers and forces are no different on sea than on land," said Robin. "Even as the goose feathers on one end of an arrow balance the weight of the barb on the other, to the making of true flight, so does deep weight in a ship balance the wind on the sail above."

EVEN with this change in the disposition of the men, however, the headlands of Wight seemed to be rushing down at them. Double crews of oarsmen were now tugging and panting at the great rowing sweeps. But the open mouth of the Solent into which the rest of the fleet was streaming like frightened pigeons was already abeam and even drawing astern.

"It will be close!" muttered the shipmaster. "Too close! Only St. Christopher could shepherd us into Solent Water now."

"If that single great square sail had been split in two, and one part stretched on a mast far forward and the other well aft," said Robin, "it had been easier to go to the west. For flattened along the length of the ship, one sail would have balanced the other, as the feathers balance the arrow barb."

"But then we would go but sideways, and not ahead—"

"Nay," said Robin. "The cog's deep hull in the water would have prevented sliding sideways; the ship would have been forced on ahead. Had we time I would have well liked to make the test. But without a forward mast—"

He broke off. Onto the now almost empty forecastle had clambered a slight form, willowy, and almost seeming to bend like a young tree under the force of the wind. Katherine Algelt's kirtle was spray wetted and glued to her slender body, and her dark hair was straining in the wind. Despite the reeling of the cog and the hammering of the waves, there was no fear in her face. She clung to a shroud, flushed and in high excitement.

"The wind, it has the sound of a thousand clarions, and the waves are like the beating of great drums!" she exclaimed. "Only the good God in Heaven could fashion such beauty as a storm!"

"You are not afraid?" asked Robin, staring.

"Afraid?" She caught at her streaming mantle and laughed. "At the storm that the good God fashions? Nay!"

"But the good God also fashions sharp rocks," muttered Shipmaster Swann, and then as hastily crossed himself. "Now will I pledge the good St. Christopher a full score of tapers for the altar of Romney Abbey, if these rocks take us not full abeam!"

But even as he spoke, there was a shout from the stern, and many men running. The great steering sweep came around and over, and the *Falcon* ceased its vain struggle toward the Solent mouth. Full before the storm the cog swept, now more swiftly than any slim galley, and straight toward the open Channel. Not half a bowshot away the outthrust of rocks of Wight swept past, so near that the roar of the breakers was thunderous. Like some petrel of the storm with outspread wings the cog drove on, into the open Manche.

"Not one score, but two score candles of the purest wax will I burn to St. Christopher!" said the shipmaster with a great sigh. "The *Falcon* is a stout cog

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and we may well hope to weather the storm in the open Channel now. And the Frenchman is a good pilot—he made past the rocks with not a short cablelength to spare."

"Aye," said Robin Santerre. "Aye. He made it with a good reckoning. Even too good reckoning, mayhap." His eyes were brooding and thoughtful.

CHAPTER V

'WARE BUTCHER DE BRENN

ALL that afternoon the cog ran, under the merest rag of sail, for long since the shipmaster had lowered the yard lest the exceeding force of the wind tear even the shortened sail out of its holdings. Even so the *Falcon* drove like a wild thing, curveting and plunging.

The land behind had been lost beyond the spray and scud, and on all sides was only the riot of foaming waters. So fast the ship drove that Robin was afraid they might be hurled across the Channel in the night and shattered on the rocks of France. Having the same worry, Shipmaster Swann held council with the pilot and de Brenn. As a result of which, the cog's head was kept off as far as possible to the west and an open run down the Channel.

But when nightfall came, no one aboard slept. The skies were as black as ink, without any stars to guide, and the cog seemed to be racing in an abysmal void halfway between sea and sky.

But in the last daylight hours before the night closed down, the shipmaster had turned the sailors to work, tightening the ship against the storm. Great hides had been spread over and atop the more delicate cargo, including especially Robin's sacks of serpentine and charcoal. Leathern buckets were brought out, and lines of men set to scooping the bottom water from the hold and passing it hand by hand to the side where the last man hurled it back into the sea.

Through all the night they kept at the labor, the archers and men-at-arms taking turns with the sailors, so that the ship remained dry and safe despite the spray that constantly drenched aboard. But as Shipmaster Swann had boasted, the *Falcon* was a stout cog, and her timbers held against the wrenching of the sea.

"The heavy weight of the bombards low in the bottom also steadies her," pointed out Robin. "They give her balance against the top castles and the mast. But it is well that we did not attempt to make fast one of the bombards atop the castle, like a ship ballista."

Shipmaster Swann shuddered. "It would have carried a-loose ere now, no matter how stout the lashings. And only God's mercy could have saved us then from it crashing down and battering a great hole in the bottom planking."

With the coming of morning, the sky was still gray and sunless, nor was there any land yet in sight. For which all on board devoutly gave thanks with many *aves* and *pater nosters*. The shipmaster remarked that undoubtedly the wind had changed, and hence they were driving down the length of the Manche, perhaps almost to the Western Sea itself.

"And what lies there?" demanded Wat the Armorer grimly.

"I know not. On the English side, lies Cornwall and the Lizard, and beyond that even the Land of Eire to which I was once blown. But on the opposite side of the Manche, beyond the Gulf of Gascony, lies the land of the Basques, the marches of Spain, and so on even to the countries of the Paynim whom our grandfathers' grandfathers fought against in the great Crusade."

Sir Allen Mayne, who had joined them, looked sober. "These Basques—I have heard tell of them, and it was an ill telling. Men have it that they are as scant of mercy as the Paynim themselves, so that any luckless traveler who falls into their hands does not live for long."

So for another night and still another day the storm held, driving the cog ever into the rolling wastes. Then at last the gale blew itself out, and the cog ceased to groan and rack, and men found chance

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to lie down and sleep. When morning came, it brought with it the warming sun, and a gentle breeze springing from the west.

THEN a council was held between de Brenn and Sir Allan, to hear the arguments of the shipmaster and the pilot. Robin stood near, listening.

"There is naught to do save steer back toward the east," advised the pilot. "If we hold to the north, where mayhap England lies, it might be that we would miss England altogether, and even Eireland, and thereupon be lost in the great Western Ocean itself. But to the east we should strike land, which may tell us where we are. Thus we can set the course homeward again."

"Then it had best be done speedily," grumbled the shipmaster. "Already the drinking water runs low. There are not three half-butts left for both men and horses, and that stinking"

"To the east, then, with all sail!" ordered the baron. "If we find not land and fresh water ere long, we shall risk the losing not only of our chargers but our lives as well."

So with the sail raised to the full once again, the cog was put toward the east. At last, on the seventh day out of Southampton, they sighted a tall coast, and beyond it the loom of even taller hills.

"What is this, pilot?" demanded Sir Allan sharply. "These hills—you have knowledge of them?"

But the pilot shook his head. "It is a landfall I have never set eye upon."

"Then skirt the coast and steer more to the north for another day," ordered Baron de Brenn. "We have the dregs of the drinking casks to last us one day further yet."

So the *Falcon's* head was held up still more, and all that day they skirted the coast, keeping it plain in sight but steering wider of it at nightfall, lest in the dark they run onto the deadly fangs of some rocky point.

Robin, however, watched on the forecastle where Sir Allan stood, likewise looking across to the now invisible land with gloomy eyes.

"That land would be Gascony or Normandy, mayhap, and either one worse than the other to make a landing. Undoubtedly the French King has knowledge of our gathered fleet, and his ships and corsairs will be quick to fall upon any lone ship of England."

"Yet we must have water," said Robin. "It would take days yet to beat against this unfavoring wind and so back to England."

"But the Frenchmen will begrudge us their water as much as their land. And with only a score of archers and Jarold's dozen men-at-arms, we might find it a hard landing."

Like two tall shadows out of the night Red Hubert and John the Wolf came up to join them.

"If this pilot knows not the landfall here, as he claims," said Red Hubert, "it is strange how eagerly he talks to the Butcher de Brenn, with great pointing and gesturing to the land side. And strange how the Butcher nods back, and seems so greatly pleased."

"What?" exclaimed Sir Allan. "You saw and heard them thus?"

"Aye. On the stern-castle but now. A friar could have said ten credoes while John Wolf and I spied upon them."

"You spied, you say? But did you hear their words?"

"Heard, but could make naught of them, since they gulped in outlandish Norman-French. But methinks we heard the words 'Gascony' and 'Normandy' amid their gulpings."

"Gascony! Normandy!" Sir Allan whirled on Robin. "What think you of this?"

"THE same that I thought, that first day out of Southampton, when this pilot steered so wide from the fleet," said Robin. "I think this pilot is a traitor, fit for hanging. And that he steered so of

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purpose, that we should miss the Solent and be forced out alone into the Channel."

"But to what gain?" inquired the knight puzzledly.

"To the gain of all these bombards and their store of powder and ball, as well as we few men who know how to discharge them," answered Robin. "If through the pilot's falseness we and the bombards should end up in the hands of the King of France, I doubt not the pilot could ask and receive much gold for the treachery."

"But the pilot has no knowledge of the bombards' power. In truth, had I not seen with my own eyes when they battered down the stout steel bars and oaken doors of Bewly town hall when we rescued the Prince, I would not have believed it myself!"

"And what you saw, de Brenn saw as well, since he came late to that same rescue."

"De Brenn!"

"Aye. Was it not he that assigned the pilot to have charge over the loading and the stowage? Had the powder been all ruined by that bottom water, or had the falling bombard crushed the bottom planks, sinking of the whole cog and cargo, it would have been an ill blow to King Edward's battles. But not nearly so ill a blow as for the King of France to capture the bombards for his own artillery."

Wat the Armorer had come, curious, and now he put in his own word. "The Flemish maid—the daughter of the merchant Algelt—she said somewhat of a Count de Brenn in French Normandy. If they be kin, mayhap there is a reckoning between them."

Sir Allan nodded, frowning. "On our own King Edward's ship there is a Norman Lord, D'Harcourt, who is blood brother to a full *comte* in the French king's army, yet is treasonably come to guide our English army into his own country. If we have treason helping us, it may well be that the French have the same."

"Then let us do a good deed both for our king and for ourselves by drowning this treason forthright," said Red Hubert cheerfully. "The stern is dark, and the ship asleep. Within two winks Wolf John and I can waylay both this Judas pilot and the Butcher himself and cast them overside."

But Robin shook his head. "We have not full proof as yet, and without proof it would be murder. Also we may have more need of them alive than dead. All we may do as honest men is to keep good watch with both eyes and ears."

"A sound saying, if we did but know from what point danger threatens," said the knight. "Of ourselves and Tyrel's archers and Jarold's men-at-arms we are sure. But of the cog's sailors we know naught, save that the shipmaster looks honest."

"Both honest and tight-mouthed," agreed Robin. "We might do well to speak with Master Swann."

The shipmaster, when they summoned him quietly to the forecastle, knitted his brows over their inquiry.

"For all but two I can answer, for they have been long in the *Falcon* with me. But there are two new men—Black Arnuf and Adam of Rye—who joined last week to make the full crew. Their honesty I cannot vouch for, but they know well their craft, since smugglers must be good sailormen."

"Smugglers!"

"So I heard rumor. But many good fishermen along the Five Ports hold smuggling to be no evil, since the King's tax brings him unearned profit."

"And whence do the smugglers obtain the goods for their smuggling?" demanded Robin quietly.

"From France and Flanders, mostly, since Eire-land lies too far distant."

"And have you noted these two smugglers of yours in talk with de Brenn or the pilot?"

"Not with de Brenn. But only yesternoon I marked them sharing a flask of wine with the pilot."

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When Master Swann had gone away again, Sir Allan drew a deep breath. "It may mean naught, and it may mean much. But none the less, to keep watch on their doings may bring us sounder sleep."

"John Wolf will take the forecastle, I will take the after-castle, and Peter Joy the hold," said Red Hubert quickly. "So go soundly to thy sleep. Not a one of us but could split a flying pigeon with a shaft, if need be."

"And you and I will take turn by turn, Robin," said Sir Allan. "I will stand watch until the half-night, and then you until the dawn."

But the night passed peacefully enough. The new day came with a warm sun and a pleasant sea and a breeze that swung the cog along at a rippling pace.

WITH the daybreak the pilot had turned the ship nearer in toward shore, until they skirted it at but four good bowshots' distance. The sailors, meanwhile, had fetched out the brazier and the covered embers they had nursed throughout the storm, and for the first day in many they had the taste of fresh-warmed meat with their flasks of wine.

It was the girl, who first caught sight of the opening in the land.

There between two great ridges of hills had opened a green and gentle valley. The greenness was swiftly accounted for by the sight of a white and tumbling fall of water that plunged down the rocky hillside to join a turbulent stream at the valley mouth.

From the shout aft, they knew that the waterfall and stream had been sighted there also. And after a little time de Brenn came climbing onto the stern-castle to look long and close, and to have much talk with the pilot.

"Water!" exclaimed Wat the Armorer, joining Robin and the girl. "And so clear and swift that it arouses a great fire in my throat at the very sight. Doubtless now Butcher de Brenn will be quick to hoist out the casks and fill them for both men and horses."

But strangely enough the pilot did not steer toward shore. He ordered the sail half-lowered instead, so that the cog barely made headway through the water. And while almost the whole morning dragged, de Brenn continued his careful watch on the shore. Master Swann, who had already made ready the casks and the small boat housed in the waist, began to stride up and down and mumble impatiently.

Sir Allan and Hubert had also come up on the forecastle where they muttered with equal impatience.

"It would seem to me better reckoning to have made a quick dash in to fill the casks, and then away again," said Robin. "Thus the Frenchmen, if there be any there, would have no time to collect and stand in force against our landing."

"De Brenn thinks it better caution to spy out the land well in advance," explained the knight. "He recks that if for another hour we sight neither man nor boat ashore, it will mean certain that there is no habitation there."

"Then squinting through visor slits makes for poorer sight than looking over goose-feathered shafts," growled Red Hubert. "Once and yet again I would have sworn I glimpsed a wisp of smoke, quick snuffed, beyond that first turn of the valley."

"Smoke!" exclaimed Sir Allan. "Then I had best report your glimpsing to de Brenn at once."

But already the sailors were busied at hoisting out the boat and the empty casks. When the knight returned, he was grim.

"De Brenn thinks danger is more like to come from corsair galleys at sea than from land. So he has ordered me and all the archers to stay on board for defense of the castles. Wherefore, since the bombards are all stored below and you have naught to do, you and your bombardiers are to go ashore with a couple of sailors for the oars, to fill the casks."

"We only—without defence of any sort?" demanded Robin in surprise.

"Nay, you take with you Jarold's men-at-arms—a round dozen."

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"Now that is a fool's order," said John the Wolf, his lean jaws snapping. "He should have sent archers. For defence against ambushments or sudden raids, one stout archer is worth ten men-at-arms!"

But Robin was frowning. "Two sailors, you say. What two sailors?"

"The two whom Shipmaster Swann forespoke as smugglers—Black Arnuf and Adam of Rye."

"Who as smugglers mayhap know this coast almost as our own," said Robin. All at once his eyes began to widen and to dance. "It is not likely that de Brenn or the pilot would know Tyrel's archers by face, save for Tyrel himself, mayhap? Or that they would have any better knowledge of Jarold's men-at-arms?"

"No," agreed Wat the Armorer, puzzled. "But what has that to do with our landing?"

"This much," said Robin softly. "If a round dozen of Tyrel's archers borrowed sword and basinet and mailed shirt from Jarold's men, they would appear, going ashore, only as so many men-at-arms, would they not? And if by chance and Shipmaster Swann's help, their bowstaves and sheaves of arrows were hidden in the bottom of the small boat—"

"By my bow, you have it!" exclaimed Red Hubert, his face agrin. "And not only Tyrel's bowstaves and shafts in the boat, but mine and Wolf John's and Peter Joy's as well." He jerked his great thumb rudely into John the Wolf's ribs. "My quiver against your baldric, old Wolf, that I speed three shafts to your every two!"

"That may be," said the weazened archer tartly. "But the ransom of my first Frenchman against your bow that I drop as many men with my two shafts as you with your three!"

CHAPTER VI

ARCHERS, BEND BOWS

THUS it was that when the pilot brought the cog close in to short bow-shot from shore, Tyrel's archers in the borrowed mail and casques of Jarold's men-at-arms were rowed ashore, five at a time, by the two smugglers, Arnuf and Adam of Rye. As they landed they formed defense in a little group, pikes advanced and sword to hand and their keen eyes searching of the valley beyond the waterfall.

Then Robin and Wat the Armorer, with Hubert and John the Wolf and Peter Joy, made up the last boatload, the empty casks towed astern on a hempen line.

Arnuf was a black-browed, sullen man, and Adam of Rye was small and furtive-eyed, moving with a rat-like quickness.

Great was the surprise of these two when, as he stepped out, Red Hubert jerked aside the soft cowhide that Master Swann had stretched in the bottom of the boat, and began lifting out the long bowstaves and goose-feathered shafts. As fast as he lifted them, he passed them to Tyrel's men who came running up and received each his own bowstave and sheaf of arrows. In a trice each archer had taken his coiled bowstring from beneath his steel cap, and had strung his bow. Then with arrows sheathed in their arms, they advanced to and beyond the waterfall.

Black Arnuf stared at the amazing sight of men-at-arms suddenly changed to archers. He glanced at his comrade Adam, and then back toward the cog. He raised his arm and seemed half of mind to shout. But that Red Hubert stopped by clutching his windpipe with a grip that had his eyes bulging.

"The casks—the water butts!" said the giant bombardier. "Lay hand to them, and make haste to the filling. We five will follow close behind with the others."

His fierce glower and Wat the Armorer's gesture with his keen-bladed knife sent the two sailors hurrying to seize each a cask. Rolling them along over the sloping ground, they brought all the casks to the pool made at the foot of the fall by the cascading water from above.

"And now, Peter Joy," said Robin, "while the casks are filling, do you climb these steep rocks alongside the fall, and call out whatever you may see."

As Peter Joy scrambled up the rocky

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slope like a goat, Wat the Armorer took charge of the sailors and made quick work of the cask filling. He was pounding in the last bung, when Peter Joy above let out a wild shout.

"They come—they are almost upon us! Two score—five score—and mounted men as well as foot!"

THE alert archers needed neither Robin's nor Wat's orders to swing shields to front and crouch low. And well they did, for suddenly from the top of the low shoulder shutting off the upper valley came a whirring, singing noise like a cloud of hornets a-swarm. Feathered shafts hammered on bullhide shields, and crossbow quarrels clanged on casques and steel mail.

One of Tyrel's archers cursed, and tugged at a barbed shaft that had bitten into his thigh, until his neighbor broke the shaft short, and jerked the feathered end free. Then around the bend of the shoulder poured a full two hundred Frenchmen, weapons glittering and voices shouting.

"Two paces! Take two paces distance, each man!" shouted Wat the Armorer, looking appraisingly toward the oncoming horde. "Ground shafts! Loose shafts—and the devil take the laggard!"

At the word, the archers quickly spread into a thin line so that each man had arm space and to spare. Then the sheaf thong was ripped away, and each archer thrust his arrow barbs into the earth beside his left foot so that the nocks stood up waist high and close to hand. They each nocked and drew an arrow full to the ear, regardless of the shafts and quarrels that still buzzed and hummed. Then at a full hundred paces the feathered arrows flew.

And like stricken deer, a dozen of the Frenchmen in the front of the onrushing wave plunged and fell, one man for every shaft. Yet they had not even touched ground before again the bowstrings twanged, and another dozen arrows sped. These French levies made fair targets, and there were those among the forest men who could draw and loose four shafts before the first had fallen to earth.

Side by side, Red Hubert and John the Wolf were bending their bows and exchanging gibes while their arrows flew.

"The tall one with the beard—mark him, John, and then mark this shaft. Through the eye—Ho, said I not so!"

"But you said not which eye!" retorted John the Wolf. "The left eye of the bowman to the left, with the devil's windlass—mark you, the left eye, Hubert! And it is the left eye that takes the shaft!"

Against that deadly rain of arrows the undisciplined French levies, poorly armed and recruited from the countryside, could not stand. For the first time they encountered the amazing archery of England that was to be the wonder of the continent for the next hundred years. Riddled and with half their numbers down, they turned to flee.

Whereupon the two score mail-clad knights and men-at-arms who rode behind them drew their swords. They spurred their horses forward, regardless of living or dead, riding down the fugitives and trampling the dying. Then, their horses bloody of fetlock, they massed for a heavy charge and came on thundering.

"And this," said Red Hubert calmly, "will be different. Arrows will not pierce those shields and closed casques and ringed hauberks. Have a care, old Wolf, or they will split thy pate for thee."

"It will be an ill splitting if I lay hand to their stirrups first," growled Wolf John, fingering his stabbing knife.

But Robin broke in with a quick shout.

"Spread apart! Spread apart, with most archers to the left! Make a lane that they may see us here at the fall and charge for us!"

"Truly you are in haste to get your own pate split, now!" marveled Red Hubert.

But Wat the Armorer cried him down. "The lad is right! Robin is right! For when they ride at us, with right arms raised high to slash, their armpits will be bare of defense. Then those archers who

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are keen of eye may pierce them through!"

"By my bow, thou wilt be wearing knight's spurs yet!" exclaimed Red Hubert admiringly. He raised his voice in a mighty shout. "Their armpits! Draw shaft at their armpits!"

NO SOONER had he shouted than the archers in front scattered, forming irregular line again on either side, and backed up the slopes a little way amid the rocks. Seeing this and thinking they had broken in flight, the oncoming French knights raised their battle cry and drove at Robin and the few who remained still at the pool below the fall.

Only when they were within a score of yards did the charging men-at-arms learn the trap that had been laid for them. Then as the bows twanged, in an instant the crowding troop was thrown into a turmoil. Men screamed and groaned, pitched from their mounts or reeled, clinging to their saddles. Riderless steeds were plunging and snorting at the fallen bodies and the smell of blood.

But those in the center, protected by their companions to either side, still came on, though at each instant their number became smaller. One tall Frenchman on a great black horse, with arms as sable as his mount, spurred upon Robin and Wat, in his hand an upraised mace with a star-pointed head. None of the archers at the right seemed able to bring him down.

Robin hurriedly snatched up the shield and sword the wounded archer had dropped, sprang in front of the grizzled armorer. But at that instant Red Hubert's voice called out:

"Left-handed! He has no exposed armpit on this side, old Wolf! So aim at his casque! At his casque, old wolf, and hold string till I give word. Then both together—*now!*"

Almost as one their taut strings twanged. And almost as one the steel-barbed arrows struck full and fair on the side of the Frenchman's helmet. Even though they could not penetrate the thick plate armor, so terrific was their force high up on the head that they overturned the knight, hurled him from the saddle as if he had been pole-axed. He lay crumpled on the ground, his heavy mace, torn from its wrist-thong in his fall, flew on and thudded harmlessly on Robin's upthrown shield.

At his fall, the remaining horsemen lost heart and fled. There were less than half of those that had charged. John the Wolf was like a leaping cat as he bounded on the fallen Frenchman, jerked open his visor with knife raised to strike. But after one glance at the contorted visage with its blood-streaming lips and nostrils, he rose, sheathed his blade.

"Dead, with his brain fair addled!"

Lowering his shield, Robin took a glance around the stricken field.

"It is finished. Now to the casks, and with them to the boat, before the Frenchmen collect courage to come again!"

Breaking off the battle as quickly as they had begun it, the archers came scrambling back, with only a few gashes and bruises to show for their fighting. They laid hand to the casks, began to roll down toward the boat.

It was only then that Robin perceived the black-browed Arnuf standing as if frozen, a look of fright on his face. The cause of his fear was Peter Joy, standing to his back with a knife-point thrust against his ribs.

"This one made move to flee, so I pricked him with my point to keep him safe." Peter Joy grinned.

"Where is the other one—where is Adam of Rye?" inquired Robin hurriedly.

The rat-like little sailor was nowhere in sight, nor was he among the dead on the field when they made search.

"Methinks I saw him scampering like a rabbit when the charge was at its height," said Red Hubert, scratching his red thatch. "He raced almost underneath the mace of the black Frenchman. And I thought it strange at the time that the Frenchman did not strike him down."

"Then he is gone," said Robin. "So should we too be gone back to the cog, and swiftly."

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Into the first boatload he placed the wounded archer and Arnuf, with Hubert to man the other oar, and two of the full casks they tied on behind to tow. Four trips the boat made back and forth before Robin and Wat and three picked men who had remained to the last, reached the cog.

CHAPTER VII

BOAR'S HEAD ON SCARLET

SIR ALLAN waited there at the side, and Shipmaster Swann, and de Brenn with a pallor on his face. The water casks had been swung in and stowed, and now the shipmaster was in haste to swing the boat in as well. When it was done, without waiting for orders the shipmaster bawled to the sailors, and the great sail ran up and the steering sweep was put over. Quickly the cog began to pull away from the land.

"An ambush? You fell into an ambuscade?" inquired the knight quickly.

"Come away to the forecastle, and I will tell you," said Robin in low tones.

When he had told, Sir Allan's face grew grim.

"Then it was treason? They were lying in wait for you? You think it was for that, that the pilot kept the cog off shore all morning?"

"It so seems. For not so soon otherwise could they have collected in such force, with horsemen, full harnessed."

Sir Allan gave a great oath, laid his hand to his swordhilt.

"Then I will split this pilot now, and have done with treachery."

"Too late for that," said Robin. "Look—that is what I feared. Adam of Rye has found his corsairs by now." And he pointed.

Around the point of land astern and to the southeast, three long black ships had poked their bows. Their single sails amidships bellied, and rows of oars threshed water on either side. And their forecastles and waists were black with armed men.

"Galleasses—French corsairs. It is well for us that they are not galleys!" said Sir Allan, frowning. "They would catch us over-quickly then."

The bawl of Master Swann told that he had sighted the ships almost as quickly. Men ran on the *Falcon's* decks, getting out the great rowing sweeps. And under full sail and oars the cog fled out to the open northern sea.

Instantly Sir Allan was up and shouting, sending the men-at-arms and the archers to the two castles. The sailors were lugging great stones and bars of iron, carried for that purpose, up onto the high castles to be hurled down upon any who should approach. Mantlets of wood and hides were erected to shield the steersmen and the sailors at their stations.

Shipmaster Swann paused for a moment, to wipe the sweat from his forehead. He glanced back at the three corsairs.

"It will be a long chase, and a close one."

"Mayhap we can give them the slip if we stay ahead till nightfall," said Sir Allan."

"Aye. Not only night, but that gray cloud to the south brings rain as well." Master Swann pointed off to the south where already the sparkling sea had begun to darken.

Within two hours, however, the corsairs were perceptibly closer, and the rain still held off, though the wind had freshened.

"Master Swann," said Robin, "if you had a spare mast and sail, we might even test the matter of that forward balance sail I mentioned once before."

"The sail I have, but not the mast. Howbeit, there is an extra yard for the mainsail, if that would do."

"Fetch it, and a couple of sailors handy at lashing, and we will do what we can," said Robin.

AT THE same time he called Hubert and Peter Joy and sent them to collect as many empty wine flasks as they

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might find. While the sailors worked at fashioning mast and sail as he directed, he took the half score of flasks that Hubert had brought, and descended to the hold. He was carefully filling each with a double handful of Serpentine when he became aware of someone at his side. It was Katherine Algelt.

"You are measuring charges for the bombards in advance?" she inquired eagerly.

Robin shook his head. "Nay, not bombard charges. But something that may do in place of bombards, if need arise."

She stared, and then suddenly she cried: "Now I know! It was one such as this that caused the great noise, that evening in Southampton! The shards of a wine flask—it was those I saw!" And without asking, her deft hands seized a flask and began scooping the powder in.

While she worked, Robin began drawing strands from the hempen sacks, dampening and rolling them in powder, twisting them into cords. When they were rolled and dried in the sun on deck, he threaded them inside the flasks and wadded them tight with crushed bread.

By that time it was coming close to dark, and though the three galleasses were far nearer, they were still almost a mile behind.

"Now by my bow," exclaimed Red Hubert pointing to the leading galleass, "I know yon corsair for a thief as well as a Frenchman! For he has stolen our own Butcher de Brenn's banner to fly at his masthead!"

Robin saw that the corsair's war-flag was indeed in color and appearance almost the same as the scarlet banner that flew from their own cog. He thought he could even make out the sable outlines of a boar's head against the scarlet silk.

"It does indeed look alike to de Brenn's device," he said.

Sir Allan was now coming up with the shipmaster, and had heard Robin's words. He too stared at the flag.

"There might be many, even to the third and fourth degree of cousinship, who have right to wear the boar's-head sable, on gules," he said. "A bend, a charge of rondel or saltire, might well make the difference almost unseen." Yet the knight's eyes were troubled.

However, Master Swann was in haste to make his own report.

"The new sail and spar are finished and all ready for the setting."

"Hold them yet a while. Mayhap we may not need them," said Robin, glancing at the darkening sky.

The shipmaster nodded. "Aye, another hour and it will be night. If we change course then, they may miss us in the dark."

Swiftly then the dark came down, for the sky was by now completely overcast. A rain squall swooped over, pelting the sea and ship. And when it had passed, the corsairs were blotted out in the dark.

FOR still another hour the shipmaster held course, however, and then changed almost to right angles. This time the pilot did not dare to order otherwise. The cog ran under oar and sail, until at length Master Swann ordered the sail dropped and the rowing sweeps drawn in. In dead silence the cog lay drifting on the water.

"Hubert," directed Robin, "now do you and John and Peter Joy take station with your bows. And at any sound or any glimpse of light flare, do you loose shaft hard and true."

He himself remained on the forecastle, Sir Allan having taken watch at the stern.

The night seemed filled only with the noises of the wind and sea—the faint hum of the breeze against the bare cordage, the *slap-slap* of waves against the sides.

Then all at once, from the darkness to the right, Robin heard the thresh of oars, the swish of a sharp prow cutting water. From the left, and even closer, came a like sound. Then the bawl of a corsair captain rang in the dark as the galleasses searched the night for their quarry.

Robin listened, all but holding his breath.

In the cog's waist almost beneath him

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there was the sudden sharp twang of a bow. It was followed by a muffled thud, a half-groan, and then the momentary drum of heels, quickly ceasing. Robin hurried to descend.

There, close beside where the brazier had been left with its embers covered, he found Red Hubert and Peter Joy. At their feet lay a dark figure huddled.

"Arnuf. He will plot no more treason," said Red Hubert simply. "He was blowing at the brazier, holding a hempen flare to it and fanning it to flame, when Peter here loosed shaft. Peter Joy does not miss."

Sir Allan joined them.

"It was well done. Now we have naught to watch but the pilot and de Brenn."

"John Wolf has the pilot under eye and shaft where'er he moves," said Red Hubert. "And I will answer for the Butcher, though he keeps close in his stern quarters till now."

For a little while yet they stood, listening. And the two unseen galleasses on either side drew ahead and away, until even the threshing of their oars was stilled.

"Now we may sleep sweeter," said Sir Allan, breathing deep. "Do you take the first half-night watch, Robin, and I will stand guard then till dawn."

Again the rain squalls came pelting down as Robin stood wide-eyed on the forecastle. But there was no more sound of the galleasses. He began to think of the girl below, and remembering how raven black was her hair, and the flash of her eyes like sheet lightning in a summer sky. He was amazed how soon it was that Sir Allan stood beside him, and bade him stretch his limbs and sleep for the second half of the night.

ROBIN had scarce so much as fallen asleep, it seemed, before he felt hands shaking him. It was Red Hubert.

"Sir Allan sends word to come quickly onto the forecastle. The dawn comes—but with it comes something else too!"

On the forecastle Robin found not only Sir Allan, but Shipmaster Swann and Wat the Armorer, talking in worried tones.

"If in truth we do go to the southeast as this archer claims," said the shipmaster, "then the pilot or someone has changed the order of the course since last evening. For we need to go to the northwest, rather than southerly, to reach England."

"If it was not the morning star I saw through a break in the clouds, then I am blind!" retorted Hubert. "And since the morning star stays always close beside the sun, it comes always in the direction of the sunrise. But when I glimpsed it, it was here even to the left of the cog's head."

"Listen!" exclaimed the knight suddenly. "Is that not the sound of waves on rock that I hear to the right?"

"Aye!" said the shipmaster with even greater excitement. "But no more so than the sound of waves on rock that I hear to the left as well!"

"And if that is not a dog's first bark to the morning, then am I deaf as well as blind!" cried out Red Hubert.

Clear in the thinning night came the unmistakable bark of a dog, and this sound was straight ahead.

"We are almost upon the shore!" Shipmaster Swann turned and raced aft, bawling at the top of his voice. "To the deck, sailors! Awake, and to the ropes!"

Now Sir Allan was shouting, and from fore- and aftercastle came the answering shouts of the archers and men-at-arms who had held station through the night there. De Brenn's voice spoke from the darkened stern quarters, and from the steering sweep the pilot made a muffled response.

Then almost like a curtain rolled back, the low clouds and scud scattered in the east, and the dawn light came struggling through, revealing the surrounding view.

On either side ran out rocky points, and the *Falcon* had crept between them and deep into the little bay beyond. But it was not sight of these that caused Robin's stare. It was the tall gray walls, the turreted keep, the clustered rooftops of a spreading city that loomed directly ahead and all the way to the right. Along the quays and to the left lay masts and ships

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of all sorts, on whose decks already horns were blowing and sailors shouting. From the stronghold walls and from the town itself other horns were blowing, bells ringing, and drums beating. Had the lone *Falcon* been King Edward's fleet itself, the alarm could not have been greater.

Master Swann's voice rose in a shout of panic.

"Cherbourg! Cherbourg—see the shipping and the castle walls? And with the wind from the sea we are fair caught almost beneath them!"

"Nay! In the trap, but not caught yet!" answered Robin. "Now is time to spread and test that new sail you fashioned but last night. Forward—set it forward, and haul the sail as taut to the bow as you may. And the same with the great main sail, drawing it toward the stern and not across-ship!"

Desperation rather than belief sent the shipmaster running. There was a sudden brawl at the stern, and then Red Hubert came dragging the pilot, Pierre, from the steering sweep, holding him clear of deck. He was kicking and spitting like a caught cat.

"Onto the forecastle with the traitor—and set a man to guard him well!" ordered Sir Allan grimly. "And we win clear, I will hang him from the masthead with my own hands!"

CHAPTER VIII

A FLASK OF POWDER FOR FRANCE

THE cog's forward progress had ceased now and with the steering sweep put over and the rowing sweeps threshing, she was slowly coming around. But she hung there, while Master Swann and his seamen struggled to set the sails and masts as Robin had instructed.

De Brenn had climbed to the stern-castle now in full armor, and the cog became strangely hushed except for the slight clinking of metal as men donned byrnies and casques, and the strum of bowstrings when the archers tested their tautness.

With a shout Shipmaster Swann finished his work and set the new sail to the wind, even as from the top of the tall sea wall there sounded a brazen horn, drawing Robin's eyes that way.

On top of the wall huddled figures moved about a contrivance of timbers and beams, Robin saw the long spoon beam wound back. There was a moment's pause, and then the rumbling clatter and jerk of the great siege engine. The spoon beam flew through its full arc, and from it at the top of its swing soared a whirling boulder. So slowly it came in its long swoop that the eye could follow the turnings of its jagged sides. With a mighty splash the ballista missile, almost half the height of a man, and of four men's weight, dropped into the harbor, short of the *Falcon*.

"Good luck to us that it missed," growled Wat the Armorer, beside Robin. "An one of those flying mountains strike us fair, it will make such a hole as all the harbor will not fill up!"

Even as he spoke, the ballista rattled again. And this time the hurtling stone fell so close that it splashed the cog's sides in falling.

"Steer close into the wind and as close under yon castle wall as you may!" shouted Robin to the shipmaster. "So close—that the ballista will overshoot us!"

Instantly the shipmaster was running aft. With steering sweep outswung and rowing sweeps threshing and the newly set sails flat and drawing, the *Falcon* turned recklessly in toward the gray castle wall that upreared from the very water's edge. The fourth stone struck the cog's bow a glancing blow that nevertheless shook it to its keel, but thereafter the missiles passed harmlessly overhead. The artillerymen at the siege engine vainly tried to depress their aim.

Now, however, there was a stir among the mass of shipping, and half a dozen long prows thrust forth. Two of them were galleys, packed with men, and the other four were galleasses. Seeing which Red Hubert let out an oath.

"By my halidon, it is the same French-

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men as of last night. See the boar's head on yon third ship?"

There was no doubt now that the Frenchmen flew a red banner with a black boar's head upon it.

But the galleys were coming on apace, their banked oars beating the water, their castles packed with fighting men.

"Ho, Tyrel!" shouted Red Hubert to the captain of the archers on the stern castle. "Do you take the steersmen of that right galley, and we here will take the left! And waste no shafts!" Then turning to Peter Joy and John the Wolf beside him, "I will take the front man on the steering sweep, Peter the next, and you, old Wolf, the third."

On came the two galleys, drawing nearer together and pointing their bows inward. It was a favorite maneuver—to ram the opponent's stern oars and then sweep alongside for the boarding attack. So sure were they of their prey that their crews set up a shout of triumph.

THEN from the cog's fore- and after-castles came such a stream of arrows as changed their triumph instantly into dismay. With their first discharge, though the distance was almost two hundred yards, Hubert and Peter Joy and John the Wolf had found their marks.

Spitted, the three Frenchmen at the galley's steering sweep loosed their hold and dropped kicking and screaming to the deck. Almost as fatal had been Tyrel's marksmen. Of the three steersmen on the right galley one still remained afoot, though sore wounded. His sagging weight pushed the sweep so that that galley veered around. Within six oar strokes it crashed into its companion, with a great shattering of oars. Then the two galleys, helpless and disabled, began to drift under the English bows.

The archers from the New Forest did not fail to take advantage of that mishap. As fast as they could draw and notch arrow, they sent the shafts speeding They swept the galley castles clean, and then raked oarsmen and fighting men.

But the English cog was by no means free of danger. From the bowmen on the galleys, as well as those on the other ships now coming up fast, came a flood of missiles that seemed to darken the sky. A sailor alongside the cog's mast staggered, with feathers buried almost to his chest, and caught for a moment at the ropes; then he crumpled and fell. One of the archers beside Robin coughed oddly and sat down, the blood bubbling from around the crossbow quarrel that had pierced his throat. Another quarrel took Robin full on the steel headpiece so that his ears rang and his brain reeled.

Nor were the French ships the only threat. For so close had the English ship come under the sea wall of the castle now, that the bowmen there had found the range. They began raking the cog.

"An we could gain clear of yon castle wall, we would find stronger breeze there, and might even yet win clear," grumbled Shipmaster Swann, eyeing the slack sails gloomily.

"But not without bloody brawling yet," answered Wat the Armorer, scowling. He pointed astern to where the four galleasses were coming fast.

The archers could not spoil the steering as they had done with the galleys, for the great square sails of the galleasses shut off all sight of the steersmen behind. With their numerous oars they were gaining on the cog at every stroke. The galleass with the boar's head banner was in the van, with another just a scant stroke to the side and behind. From the left quarter and the right they drove at the cog, their bows already packed with yelling boarders, waiting but for the impact to leap.

Already Sir Allan was leading half the force of men-at-arms to one threatened waist, while Jarold led as many to the opposite side. The archers on both castles continued to sweep the packed Frenchmen with their whirring shafts.

"Now if we had but the bombards loaded, and could fire through the cog's side as we fired through the door of the

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weaver's shop in Bewley," said Wat the Armorer, "we could make short work of these Frenchmen. Six shots each at the water's edge would shatter them."

"Not yet, but some day, mayhap," said Robin. "Howsoever, there are other things than bombards."

Scrambling from the forecastle, he hurried toward the deck where he had laid his readied flasks the night before.

When he reached the brazier, he found someone else there before him. Regardless of the flying arrows and clanging quarrels on all sides, Katherine Algelt knelt beside the brazier. She had scooped the ashes away and was blowing the embers to redness, while against them she held the frayed end of a bit of hempen rope. Quickly the rope end took fire; a smoking red spark began to travel down its length.

"Away from the deck, and into the hold!" cried Robin. "This is no place for a woman! Into the hold, quick, before a flying quarrel finds thee!"

Her face was pale, but her lips were tight and her eyes obstinate as she made answer. "The brazier—it is too unhandy to carry to the threatened side. But this rope end, it will serve as well. And there are the flasks, too, to carry."

"Nay, get below—and swiftly—"

The rest of Robin's words were cut off. With a rending crash the leading galleass rammed the cog from the left quarter, and almost instantly the other Frenchmen followed on the right. Stout as were the cog's timbers, she reeled and quivered from stem to stern with the shock of the impacts.

Instantly the cog's sides were buried under a mass of leaping boarders.

BUT there to meet them were Sir Allan and the men-at-arms. The knight's sword was like a long-bladed ax that rose and fell, and with each blow it cut down a boarder. From the cog's castles, too, the sailors were now hurling down their heavy stones and bars of iron, each missile carrying down half a dozen boarders when it struck.

What boarders avoided the slashing swords and axes or the sailors' missiles, the archers searched out with their unerring shafts, driving barbed points deep between steel cap and shield. The Frenchmen fell into the water, back onto their own decks, even down into the cog's hold.

Twice the cog's defenders beat the Frenchmen back, but still the boarders came. And even the strong arms and stout hearts of these English fighting men could not keep up the battering forever. A man-at-arms went down, and then another. And through the gap Frenchmen were pouring.

It was then that Robin touched the glowing rope end to the powder-ingrained cord sticking from a flask neck. He held it for a moment to make sure the hemp caught and sputtered; then he threw it. It arced just over the boarders' heads, fell into the packed mass of men on the galleass's decks. With a shattering crash it exploded, spurting out flames and a great billow of smoke. And full into the smoke cloud Robin hurled another lighted flask, and then a third.

From the Frenchmen's deck screams arose and shouts of fear. Faces and limbs cut, their jerkins and gambesons flaming and charred from the burning powder grains, the Frenchmen broke and scattered. Pell-mell they fled, hurling each other aside, trampling the fallen, crying prayers to the Virgin for protection from this devil's fire.

Sir Allan's men-at-arms, taking courage, turned upon the half-dozen that had gained footing on the cog and cut them down or drove them headlong into the sea. To complete the rout, Robin hurled yet other twain of lighted flasks into the galleass's waist, to explode among the benches there and drive the rowers in panic from their seats.

But now cries for help from the *Falcon's* other side told that Jarold and his men were sore pressed. Not only had Frenchmen found foothold there, but they were driving Jarold's soldiers back, step by step. And over the cog's side scrambled more and more boarders.

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Shouting his battle cry, Sir Allan turned that way, his men at his heels. They struck the surprised Frenchmen and split their ranks wide apart, so sudden was their rush. Jarold's men joined quickly in the counter-attack. That whole side of the cog became a melee of flashing swords and axes, stabbing pikes, panting warriors and groaning men.

Robin discovered that only one flask remained of the armload he had first gathered up. But as he blew on the glowing hemp, he became aware of Katherine Algelt close beside him, her two arms hugging the rest of the flasks to her breast.

"Quick!" she cried. "I will hold them."

Robin lighted and hurled his powder-filled flasks, first at the boarders at the rail, and then upon the galleass's deck and bow.

It was not until he had hurled his fourth flaming missile, that the boarders from the second galleass break and flee. Safe on their own decks, they frantically thrust out with their oars and threshed away as if the Devil himself were after them.

In the sudden quiet the shipmaster's voice rang out loud and triumphant. "They draw—the sails draw! We are clear of the wall and pulling ahead!"

In truth, the castle with its gray sea wall was slipping astern. The cog's two sails, flattened fore and aft, were drawing her almost into the wind itself, against which the two remaining galeasses could make but grudging headway.

ALL at once there was a cry from the forecastle, and the trample of running feet, then the flash of a human body soaring far out from the castle top and into the sea in a clean dive.

Even with the splash came Wat's angry voice. "The pilot! He has knifed his guard, and taken to the water!"

Jerking his visor open to gulp the fresh sea air into his panting lungs, Sir Allan grunted in disgust. "Now he will get clear away! And there will be no one left to question!"

But Red Hubert's voice, drifting down from the castle overhead, made answer.

"Clear of the cog, but not safe away. Not so long as John Wolf and I have shafts to draw. . . . Old Wolf, mark him the next time he comes up! And I will mark him the second."

Almost at once the blue water broke into white a full thirty feet out from the cog's side. The fleeing pilot showed his head for but an instant before he gulped breath and dove deep again. He came up a second time, but still neither archer loosed shaft.

When the swimmer's arm broke water the next time, Red Hubert and John the Wolf were both ready. Their bows were full bent, their eyes squinting down the long shafts. And though the dark head of the pilot barely appeared, the two bowstrings twanged together. Swift as light the two shafts flew. Where they struck, the water was in an instant all aboil, at first white, and then reddened. Half out of water, the stricken pilot reared, like a hooked fish, and then fell back threshing. After a moment the threshing ceased. And there was no more sign of the swimmer.

"Now we will have naught but our word against de Brenn's," said Sir Allan sourly. "And so naught to prove his treason."

"It matters little. We have the bombards, and all safe," said Robin.

"Not if those Frenchmen still have aught to say about it," grunted Shipmaster Swann, pointing back toward the port. "Here come galleys now—not galleasses nor cogs. And not even with these new-fashioned sails of thine, Robin, can we hope to outdistance their hundred oars."

Full half a dozen long galleys had showed beyond the turn of the castle walls. That the cog was their quarry was evident by the swift change of course they made when they sighted her.

Wearily Sir Allan leaned on his long sword and looked about. His helm was dented, and his gauntlets bloodstained to the wrists.

"It has been a good fight, as should be, since it is to be our last. We cannot hope

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to defeat six galleys with the injuries we have already taken."

But Katherine Algelt, who had climbed high on the forecastle, looking about, suddenly let out a cry, pointing ahead. "Look! Ships, ships—a thousand ships!"

Ahead where the open Channel stretched its shining sleeve toward England, the horizon seemed a veritable forest of masts and sails. From right to left they stretched, galleys, cogs, and all manner of craft, with their oars threshing and their sails bellying and bright colored banners fluttering from every masthead.

Fighting men stood and cheered.

It could be naught but King Edward's fleet, come out at last from its storm-bound anchorage in the Solent.

The galleys of the Frenchmen sighted the great fleet at once, for they put about at great speed and retreated toward Cherbourg.

But Robin's eyes, loking after them, were neither amazed nor triumphant. They crinkled queerly at their corners.

"Since the Frenchman were so eager to get sight of these bombards," said he, "it were shame if we disappoint them when next we meet. And so methinks I had best go below to see that the seams have not opened and the serpentine, mayhap, soaked once more in bottom water!"

Another exciting story of Robin the Bombardier and his Devil's fire against France will appear in Argosy soon

It Jumps for Radium

FINDING a needle in a haystack is mere child's play—compared to finding nine tiny needles of radium in nine hundred pounds of wet ashes. Both jobs can be done, of course, with a modicum of patience and the right technique.

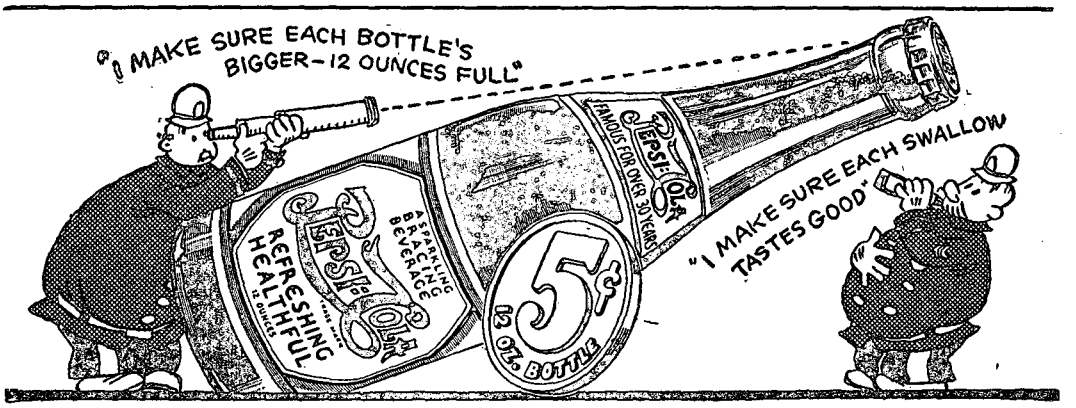
The General Hospital in Kansas City lost $1,440 worth of radium last month when a maid accidentally threw the precious needles (wrapped individually in adhesive tape) into the incinerator.

A doctor took charge then: ordered the contents of the incinerator impounded and put in a rush call for Professor Frank E. Hoecker of Kansas City University.

For Professor Hoecker had a gadget. A simple, home-made thing—his own invention. Merely a microscope focused on an air chamber. A few tiny particles of quartz in the chamber jump when influenced by the gamma rays of radium.

So the doctor and the professor went to work, after turning a hose on the ashes to cool them off. In the fifth teaspoon of the forty-fifth cupful of the twentieth bucketful of ashes, they found their first needle. Four hours later they found the last one.

—*Dr. Charles Ticknor Tolson*



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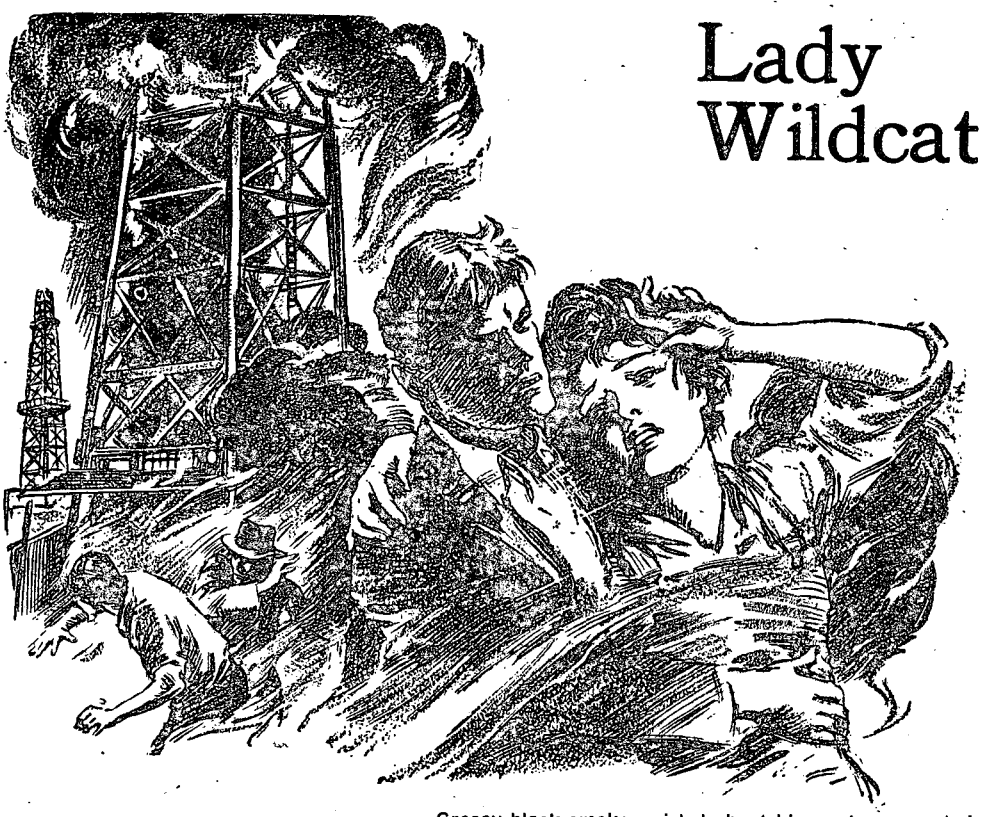
Lady Wildcat



Greasy black smoke swirled about him as he supported the girl, got her away from the advancing flames

They pushed through muck and rain and shin-kicks to a million dollars' worth of oil. And it looked like three times and out of the woods, until scrapper-in-skirts Magee took a hand

By T. T. FLYNN

Author of "Gambler's Odds," "Santa Fortuna," etc.

BY eight o'clock that night the rain really got down to business. The gumbo mud on the oil field road was a gruesome sight.

"She's molasses an' glue," the truck driver said while they were still on concrete. "I wouldn't risk a tractor an' a load of feathers out there tonight."

"It's tonight or wait a week," Danny Cole said. "Pour it to her."

"She's your pipe and truck time to pay for, mister."

Which was partly right and mostly wrong. Those thousands of feet of oil-well casings didn't belong to Danny Cole and his partner until they were paid for. And if there was no oil down there under the gumbo, the shale and the rock, there'd be no payday on the Cole-Crosby lease for ever and anon. Which was to say, never.

That was a road. The big truck and trailer threw mud and water like a runaway bulldozer. The motor raced frantically, gears whined in protest, and now and then all those tons of pipe and truck went lunging and slithering all over the road.

Danny Cole clung to the bucking seat.

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Maybe they'd make it. Probably they wouldn't. And that would be the end of Cole and Crosby. Three times—and out.

They made twelve miles of it and six more to go when they hit a mushy swale that was all water and no bottom. The truck wallowed deep, bucked and shivered.

But that rawboned redhead behind the wheel was a driver. The engine racket leaped to a high howl of effort. Low gears that would have pulled the crown block out of a hundred-and-ten-foot derrick took hold. The truck shook and shivered as it gored ahead with agonizing slowness.

"*Yow!*" the driver yelled. "Made it!"

Gears shifted again. They picked up speed. Danny Cole found he'd cracked the stem of his pipe in those critical moments. The driver didn't know that Danny Cole and Sam Crosby, three thousand feet of drill hole, derrick, machinery, and four years of heartbreaking work and scheming had almost mired down in that hole too.

"Look!" the driver said. "Waving us down! Ain't one of them a woman?"

IN the sullen pour of rain two dripping figures stood in the road mud. A black coupe coming their way had slid over and mired in the ditch.

"Nobody else'll be along tonight," the driver jerked out. "If I stop, maybe I don't get going again. What'll I do?"

"Slow down all you can," Danny said, opening the door and stepping out on the running board.

"Lookit that dame!" the driver howled. "She's gonna make me stop!"

Their headlights blazed on her slim stubborn figure, ankle-deep in the black mud. Waving angrily at them. Daring them not to stop.

Danny spoke prayerfully into the streaming rain. "If she stops us and we stall, I'll break her neck!"

Hand on the horn button, that redheaded driver rolled his tons of truck and pipe and let the devil take what stood in the road. She staggered aside in the last instant; and Danny weak with suspense, scooped her up as the truck rolled by.

Which wasn't so dangerous as it sounds, for the truck was rolling slowly and she had been a slim little slip of a thing in the headlight glare.

"Fer Go's sake!" the driver gasped as Danny and the girl landed hard on the seat.

She was so angry she stuttered. "You t-tried to run over me! Deliberately! Let me out!"

"Got stuck if we'd stopped," Danny said, swinging her to the seat between himself and the driver. "Take it easy. Here's your boy friend."

The man had made a running jump and hauled himself on the running board. His face was red with anger as he shouted: "What are you roughnecks trying to do?"

"So it's *you*?" Danny said. He pushed with his foot—and the doorway was clear once more. "I've waited two years for that," Danny chortled. "And it's twelve miles to the highway."

The girl clawed him from temple to chin. Her fingernails were sharp and her shoe heel drove into his instep as she tried to get out.

"You beast! You bully! Let m-me out!"

Danny thumped her back on the seat and closed the door.

"Sit still, lady. You asked for it and you got it. You can dry out at the well and ride back with the truck."

"You k-kicked him under the wheels! You—you tried to kill him!"

"No such luck," Danny said regretfully. "Pussyfoot Greer is a snake. He always lands belly-down and crawling. Wet night, isn't it?"

She was mad and helpless. She had a tipped-up nose and a splash of mud on a thin little-boy face. She was wet. Her hat drooped soggily.

She was a bedraggled lady wildcat out of a mud puddle, ready to spit and scratch. She was young and she wasn't pretty. Danny wondered why Greer, the lady's man, had picked her up. Hatchita, over there on the Big Pool, where Greer had made a million already, had prettier girls.

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She refused to talk. Danny forgot her as the truck swung off on the Cole-Crosby lease road, which was two ruts across the empty range. Maybe they'd make it. Maybe luck had tired of kicking Cole and Crosby around.

They sighted the derrick lights, nineteen miles from Hatchita as a crow would fly—if a crow was fool enough to fly out here, let alone sink a well with pennies.

THE driver swung around by the well and the muddy earth gave a yawn and sucked them down. They stopped, canted drunkenly. Danny jumped out to meet Sam Crosby and the drilling crew.

"You son-of-a-gun!" Sam yelled as they met in front of the headlights. "Didja really bring casing?"

"Don't let the driver hear you," Danny warned. "Get that casing off and in the ground fast."

"She's off already," Sam said joyously.

Danny went back to the driver. "Hot coffee in the office there," he said solicitously. "And a bottle."

"Lead me to it, mister."

"You too," Danny said to the lady wildcat.

"I'll wait here," she said coldly.

"Lady," said Danny, "you worry me. Do I have to carry you in to keep you from catching pneumonia?"

In frigid silence she got out and struggled through the mud with him. In the office shack she looked pale and bedraggled. Danny saw her shiver as he filled a tin cup with hot coffee. She tasted rebelliously—and kept on tasting. A little color came back into her cheeks.

"What a night," the driver said.

The rain drummed monotonously on the tin roof. The raw damp cold was getting worse. Danny cocked an ear to the welcoming clang of steel pipe coming off the truck. The driver heard it too and fished a paper out of his pocket.

"I'll be back in a minute," Danny said hastily, and went out in the rain.

The way that pipe was coming off the truck was a sight to behold. Danny stood contentedly in the rain and watched.

Sam joined him. "Greer was out here this evening."

"What did he want?"

"I dunno," Sam said. "I ran him off too quick. Had a girl along."

"I brought her back."

"You *what*?"

"Greer's car was in the ditch ten or twelves miles this side of the highway. I left him to walk out."

"Let's hope he bogs down," said Sam. "Son, you must be a wizard to have gotten this pipe."

"I am," Danny said modestly, and went back to the little office.

The driver was talking to the girl. He turned with a fishy look in his eye.

"I've got the bill for the trucking and that load of pipe," he said. "Your partner had to sign the check, they told me, and no check, no pipe. We better settle that right now."

"Sure," Danny said, taking the statements. "As soon as we find my partner, we'll settle everything. Have another drink."

THE driver muttered something under his breath and jumped for the door. Danny whistled softly between his teeth and poured himself some coffee.

The girl spoke coldly. "You're flat broke. You won't finish this well. He won't get a dollar from you tonight."

"I'll get you some clean overalls and a shirt," Danny decided. "You can sleep on the cot there while your clothes are drying."

"I'm going back with that truck driver!"

Danny said nothing for the truck driver stormed in accusingly.

"Nobody out there knows where your partner is! Nobody works a slicker on *me* like this! I'm taking that pipe back!"

"Don't blame you," Danny said soothingly. "Pick up your pipe and roll. No hard feelings."

"You know I can't load that pipe and get out of the mud myself!"

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"Too bad," said Danny. "Because we'll be dropping pipe down the hole in an hour."

The driver was temperish. His fist plastered Danny's nose flat.

"Good for you!" cried the lady wildcat.

That was all that Danny needed.

The trucker was good while he lasted. They all but demolished the interior of the little office. The lady wildcat sought safety in a back corner. Sam Crosby opened the door a bare instant before a roundhouse swing sent the trucker reeling into his arms.

"The funniest things happen on this lease," Sam marveled. Sam had a roly-poly look and a droll, ugly smile that twisted almost up to his ears now as he stood dripping water and holding the inert trucker.

"Who won the lady?" Sam asked.

Danny Cole wasn't so big or so broad. His hair was like touseled wheat straw and his face looked as if it had been jumped on as he held a handkerchief to his battered nose and faced lady wildcat.

"Undress!" Danny ordered. And as she looked startled, he snapped: "I'll bring you overalls and a shirt and dry your clothes for you. Nobody leaves this lease until the rain stops and a car can get through the mud."

She glared at him.

"Hear me?" Danny yelled.

She glared at him.

"Put him in the bunk shack," Danny seethed at Sam. "And let's get that pipe run while we've got it."

"Amen," Sam said.

THEY had thirty-two hundred feet of drill hole under the old cable-tool derrick. The engine was a museum piece. The steel cables were frayed and rotten.

They'd lost tools and fished for them. They'd lost the fishing tools and had to fish for *them*. They'd cursed and sprouted gray hairs and mumbled abracadabra as they slowly punched the hole down through the Pennsylvania limes and sands toward the Mississippian structure.

They'd poor-boyed that well down on hope and air while their lease on three thousand acres of empty rangeland went sizzling by at four dollars an acre, paid in advance by the year.

It rained all night. They were sodden, tired and hungry; an they sang, pitched rough jokes under the dim well lights as the casing went down, down, down.

"Wonder what Greer wanted?" Danny said to Sam as they paused under the driller's canopy for a cigarette. "The girl told me we were flat broke and wouldn't finish the well."

"Which'd suit Greer," Sam said. "But we've got one more day. And with the showing we've got, there ain't any doubt old man Magee will let things ride like he promised last month."

"Providing and if."

"We've provided," Sam said, staring lovingly at the new pipe. "And we'll never get a better 'if' than we can show him tomorrow."

"Today," Danny corrected, looking at the cold gray shadow of dawn in the eastern sky.

"If she's down there, she's down there," said Sam, looking at the pipe collar which supported two thousand feet of pipe hanging down in the hole. "And if she's down there, we've as good as got our hands in it, son. How'll it feel to be lousy rich?"

"Since Greer threw us a curve and stole the Big Pool right out of our pockets, I keep my fingers crossed."

"That dirty so-and-so," said Sam. "If I live long enough I'll see his eyes crossed for good. No sleep for the sinful. Let's go."

They put 'er down—thirty-two hundred feet of new casing, and knocked off for breakfast before rigging the cable tools.

THE rain had tired into a cold drizzle. The gumbo mud was something to write home about. The truck looked as if it had been planted there until harvest time.

The lady wildcat opened the office door to Danny's knock.

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"Breakfast," Danny said, holding a paper over the tin plate and coffee cup. "Sleep well? Got any snuffles this morning?"

She said: "No!" to all questions, and then looked resentful as Danny started to smile.

Overalls and shirt sleeves were rolled up—an she still looked like a little girl swathed in a tent.

"I can't help it," Danny gurgled. "You look—you look—"

"You're a horrible scarecrow yourself!" she flared.

Danny put her food down inside and fingered the stubble on his battered face. He was bleary-eyed an weary, and he felt so good he chuckled. "*My* boy friend isn't coming for me."

"I was with Greer on business," she said coldly.

"God help you then," said Danny. "We did business with him an he stole a million dollars worth of leases from us."

"You probably deserved it," she said coldly, reaching for the coffee cup.

"Nobody ever deserved Greer. Look, I'll bet he promised to get you a fat job, didn't he?"

She looked startled. "Why do you say that?"

"It's an old gag of his." Danny eyed her commiseratingly. "Pussyfoot Greer never went this far back through the rain for any girl. They come too easy. If you've got to have a job, maybe I can find one for you."

She combed her hair up on top of her head. She had the look of a little lady despite the overalls and shirt. Kind of helpless and appealing.

"If Greer shows up," Danny promised, "I'll punch him for having the nerve to kid you along. And then I'll see about your job. Ask anyone at Hachita or Hamptonville whether Danny Cole's word is good."

"I'd rather ask the driver who brought that pipe."

She said coolly:

Danny winced. "We had to have the pipe. They'll get their money. We've practically got a well here."

"Have you?" she said. "Get my clothes, please. Mr. Greer will be back an I want to be ready to leave."

"My mistake," Danny said coldly. "I thought you needed help."

And that was the end of the lady wildcat as far as he was concerned. Greer must have known that he was about with her. And yet the more Danny thought about it, the madder he got. Something about her stuck in his craw. Something that had been growing on him all night.

"Scrappy little wildcat!" he thought—and stopped.

That was it. She was a scrapper. She wouldn't back down. She said what she thought. She wasn't smooth like Greer, with words cut for the occasion.

"That heel!" Danny said into the drizzle. "He won't be back for her and I'll punch him when I see him!"

The tired mean drizzle gloomed down. The drill bits were on that monotonous, endless punching of the rock far beneath the derrick. Up and down . . . up and down—and only a greasy frayed steel cable linking hope with reality.

ONLY today was different. The lease ran out today. Old Magee had been sharper and harder than a cutting file. When his lease ran out, it ran out.

Twelve thousand cash brought you a year's drilling on his land. If you had no oil by noon of the last day, you got ready to pay another twelve thousand into the Hamptonville bank by closing time.

A hole in the ground and a lot of hope got you nothing. Old Magee hadn't gotten over not settling on a ranch that covered Hachita and the Big Pool.

Only a couple of fools would lease on such terms. But when you were almost broke and had a strong hunch about the faulted strata, you had to take what you could get.

And a month back Magee had looked at the rock cuttings out of the hole and said that he'd be fair about it. If the showings

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looked as good when the lease ran out, he'd wait for his money. Magee was hard but his word was good.

So they drilled and didn't worry too much about Magee and the twelve thousand due today. They had pipe and they were down in the Mississippian. It wouldn't be long now, one way or another.

The drizzle stopped. A feeble sun pried among the clouds. They ate lunch. Greer's girl sat on the bench before the office and ate. Her skirt, blouse and jacket were wrinkled, but she had again that slim, competent look.

Her face was clean, soft brown hair was up on top of her head. She looked like a little lady who was enjoying herself nastily and expectantly.

Danny looked at her resentfully, feeling himself blear-eyed, unshaven and dirty.

"No use," he said. "Looking down the road won't bring Greer back."

She smiled scornfully. "Are you always right?"

"I'm right about the well," Danny said shortly. "I'm right about Greer—and I'm right about you. Greer dirties everything he touches. You aren't his kind."

Her lips curled. "So you want to look out for me?"

"I wouldn't touch you with a thirty-foot pipe casing!" Danny blew up. "You—you wildcat! I was just sorry for you!"

Off by himself, he wondered why he was angry. She was stubborn, vindictive, ready to spit and scratch at sight of him. She made him feel helpless.

That must be it, Danny decided. She made him feel helpless—and furious at her preference for Greer.

After lunch the drill bits were chunking away when Danny called: "Sam, do you see what I see?"

Sam turned in the mud and stared at four riders and a horse with an empty saddle coming across the range. "Ain't that Greer and a couple of deputies?"

"Afraid to come back alone," Danny growled.

"Can't say as I blame him," Sam said.

GREER had been in bed, had shaved, changed clothes. His well-fed face was smug as he dismounted between the sheriff and the deputies. "I got here as soon as I could," he said to the lady wildcat.

"I've been expecting you," she said brightly, and looked at Danny.

Danny ignored her and greeted the sheriff evenly. "Howdy, Shockley. Looking for something?"

Shockley was a big man with a wide, weathered face. He seemed embarrassed. "I thought I'd ride over this way, Cole."

"The lady," Danny said politely, "has been dried, slept, and fed. She's been waiting for Greer to collect her. There's no charge. The pleasure's all ours."

She reddened angrily at the way he put it. But Greer had a creamy satisfied look.

The sheriff coughed, not too happy. "I don't know about Miss Magee. I guess that's all right. Mister Greer has got a little business, and insists he needs protection. . ."

Danny exploded: *"Miss Magee?"*

The sheriff nodded. "Thought you must know by now. Her grandfather owned your lease."

"Owned?" Sam said loudly.

Now you could see that Greer had been looking forward to this moment, savoring, anticipating, yearning for it.

"I bought Magee out for cash day before yesterday," Greer smirked. "Lock stock and barrel—everything but his eighth royalty. Your lease runs out today I understand—unless you've got twelve thousand for renewal by bank closing time."

Danny was husky in spite of himself. "Magee said that wouldn't be necessary."

Greer toyed with the situation like a cat chivvying a couple of mice. "Magee's packed and gone on a world cruise. I own the land now. I'm afraid we'll have to stand on the lease terms."

"Skunked again," Sam said thickly. "We couldn't make Hamptonville by bank closing time if the money was there to borrow."

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Shockley said heavily: "If I had it, boys . . ."

"Sure," Danny said. "Sure, Shockley. Thanks."

"Mr. Cole!" the driller called from the derrick.

Danny looked at the old derrick, where the frayed cable was slipping up and down in the well pipe. The last of their money, another year's work gone. And by all the signs they had a well. Maybe another Hatchita. Maybe a million or two, with three thousand acres under lease.

Now Greer would get this too. Pussyfoot Greer had slipped up on them again. For Cole and Crosby it was three times and out. Danny turned to old man Magee's granddaughter.

"It was business, wasn't it? Greer's kind of business. No wonder you were so sure he'd come. Kind of funny, isn't it? *I'll* be needing the job."

She stood looking at him.

"Mr. Cole!" the driller screamed.

The engine had stopped—as if it mattered now. Something seemed to be wrong. The drill cable looked slack. A low, moaning grunt oozed through the silence.

The driller was at the edge of the platform, waving his arms like a crazy man. "She's bringin' the drill string up!"

Sam's voice cracked on a wild woop. "We've got it! We've got it!"

Greer spoke loudly and rapidly.

"It's past noon! If you didn't have oil by noon today, your lease ran out, unless you pay next year's rental by four o'clock. Sheriff, you and your men witness the time!"

"I don't know why I didn't brain you last night!" Sam bellowed.

The sheriff and one of the deputies stopped Sam before he reached Greer. And for the time being they were rooted in fascination by what was happening. Even Sam.

THE driller and his crew were off the platform now. Limp cable was defying the law of gravity and snaking up out of the pipe. The pipe seemed to be snarling and growling under its breath. The pipe collar was shaking as the cable piled and coiled around it.

Then the water came in a muddy swooshing column that shot toward the top of the derrick like a solid bar before it broke and mushroomed out.

The water turned dark, turned black—and the oil came in a mighty column that whistled and frothed with gas. And then the drill bits were vomited out as if the heavy steel had been distasteful to the bowels of the earth.

Danny held his breath as the great bits crashed over against the derrick and slammed down in the torrent of oil plunging on the platform. One spark from steel striking steel and the well might catch fire.

Sam had his moment of madness in which he bellowed at the driller. "Get your men an' let's get a valve on 'er!" And then Sam remembered and wheeled on Danny. "Whose well is this now?"

Oil was spraying out from the derrick top. The rank smell of gas loaded the damp air. Streams of the thick black crude were snaking out over the ground in all directions. And Danny had a desperate thought.

"Lend me that extra horse, Shockley!" he burst out feverishly. "There's a ranch house and a telephone over on the new road to Hatchita. Maybe I can reach it in time to call the Hamptonville bank and get them to put the money to Greer's account. They'll do it when they hear we've got a gusher."

"Go ahead," Shockley nodded.

The horses had backed off with reins dragging and were shaking their heads and moving uneasily. Danny started toward them when he heard Magee's granddaughter cry: "Stop him!"

Behind him space coughed in a vast dull explosion. The blast hurled Danny into the mud. Breath was snatched from him. Burnt gas was acrid in his nostrils as he stumbled up groggily.

The horses were galloping off in terror. They'd not stop within sight of the well.

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A spark had fired the gas. Devils were hissing and crackling up the derrick when Danny turned. The gusher had turned into a fountain of flame. A column of black greasy smoke spewed high.

Heat already was searing out at him. The others had been knocked over. The drilling crew was scrambling to safety. Shockley and the deputies were staggering back from the inferno of fire. Sam was rolling out of a puddle of crude.

A shift of wind blew a pall of greasy, choking smoke over them. Over Greer who was farther in toward the derrick, where oil was splashing to the ground in cascades of flame. And spreading fast in a ghastly blanket of fire.

Greer was staggering up when the smoke swept down and hid him. And Greer wasn't alone. Magee's granddaughter was there by him, moving weakly on the ground.

She looked very small, terribly helpless. The blanket of fiery oil was moving toward her as the smoke closed in a swirling, opaque cloud over the spot.

"Sam!" Danny heard himself shouting hoarsely.

He was running as the smoke swirled to meet him. Sam was looking around to see what he wanted when the smoke came between them.

A stumbling, coughing wraith plunged out of the smoke and collided with him. It was Greer, alone, empty-handed.

"You rat, did you leave her?" Danny yelled, shaking him.

Greer tore away, crying: "I'm burning up!" He vanished in the smoke.

It wasn't quite that bad—but almost. Danny was choking and swearing with a terrible fear as he went on. Suppose she got up dazed and ran right into the fire? Suppose she couldn't get up and the wave of blazing oil engulfed her? Suppose crude had soaked her clothes and they caught fire?

He almost missed her in the smoke. She was staggering and uncertain. But she was heading the right way. Danny's foot slipped in a stream of crude as he lunged to the right and caught her.

Both were coughing too much for speech as Danny rushed her back through the smoke . . . and it thinned and the heat grew less as they got away from the well.

Magee's granddaughter was soot-streaked. Her eyes were running tears. She got some of the smoke out of her throat and gasped: "Thank you."

"Thank *you*," said Danny scornfully, "for trying to stop me when I started for the horse. You learned fast from Greer, didn't you?"

She had found a handkerchief and was wiping her eyes. But she wasn't crying. She was amazed and angry. "I don't know what you mean!"

Sam came toward them dragging Greer by the nape of the neck. Greer's nose was bleeding. There was blood on Sam's fist. Shockley and the drilling crew were closing in, but Shockley didn't seem to be in a hurry to stop Sam.

"HE FIRED it!" Sam roared. "Edged in close and threw a match! Blew our well up in our faces! I'll murder him for it!"

"*My* well!" Greer cried frantically. "Sheriff, stop this man! Those horses are gone now! Cole and Crosby can't get in touch with the bank by closing time now! It's my lease and *my* well!"

Sam shook him. Sam bellowed: "The girl tried to stop you! I saw you jump and throw the match after she yelled!"

Shockley was hard and menacing too. "I heard her and saw it too. The man's insane, firing a well this way."

"You think so?" Greer bawled at him. "Where are the horses now? How will they get to the bank? I knew what I was doing! Sheriff, this property is as good as mine and I'll hold you responsible if anything happens to me here!"

"Shockley," said Danny, "step back. He skunked us again. He stole another million from us when he threw that match. If it's the last thing I do, I'll make him earn it the hard way before I walk off the lease. Stand back, Shockley, even if you are the sheriff!"

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"My eyes," said Shockley, "are still full of smoke. I can't see a thing. But remember, boys—murder is murder."

It might have happened. The oil game is a hard game. Four years of sweat and disappointment, Hatchita and the Big Pool, and now this, being tricked away also by Greer, did things to a man. Anything might have happened to Pussyfoot Greer, and the paying for it a matter for the future, if Magee's granddaughter hadn't run in between Danny and Greer.

To be just, Danny hadn't quite intended murder, or he wouldn't have paused to hear her out. Or maybe it had gotten to be a habit now with Danny. Listening to her.

"Let him alone!" old man Magee's granddaughter said fiercely. "Do you want useless trouble? I've got a check in my pocket for twelve thousand dollars.

"Grandfather got four times what the ranch was worth and kept his oil royalty. But he'd promised you to extend the lease and he left the money to keep his promise. Here it is, certified and better than cash. Greer will have to take it. You have witnesses."

"Yow!" Sam yelled, grabbing the slip of paper from her and inspecting it. "Who gets skunked now? Greer's stuck with the land; Magee and us get the oil! Lookit it, you snake! *Certified!*"

Sam shoved the check into Danny's hand and whirled on his drilling crew.

"Let's catch them horses and get a crew with asbestos suits here! We'll have this out by morning! Yow! I could beat a horse into Hatchita!"

DANNY looked at the check and looked at old man Magee's granddaughter. Her face was sooty and she wasn't pretty if you liked the magazine covers. Danny never had, much.

"Why didn't you tell me last night?" he asked.

"You were so sure everything you did was right. And Greer had promised grandfather he'd extend the lease. I wanted to see what he'd do."

Danny smiled just a little. "Are you sure you didn't want to see what I'd do?"

"Since you always seem to be right," said Magee's granddaughter, smiling just a little herself, "yes."

"Since I'm always right," said Danny, "and there's going to be plenty of money from now on, see what I'm going to do."

She was a lady wildcat out of the soot and the mud. Spunky enough to say what she thought. Wise enough, perhaps, to realize that Danny Cole was right for once, at least. At least she didn't spit and scratch when Danny's arms went around her.

"Kitten," Danny said, kissing her sooty cheek, "I've got a real job for you."

"I was hoping you wouldn't forget," said Magee's granddaughter honestly. "Kiss me again, Danny—and let them look."

Backache, Leg Pains May Be Danger Sign

Of Tired Kidneys—How To Get Happy Relief

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.)

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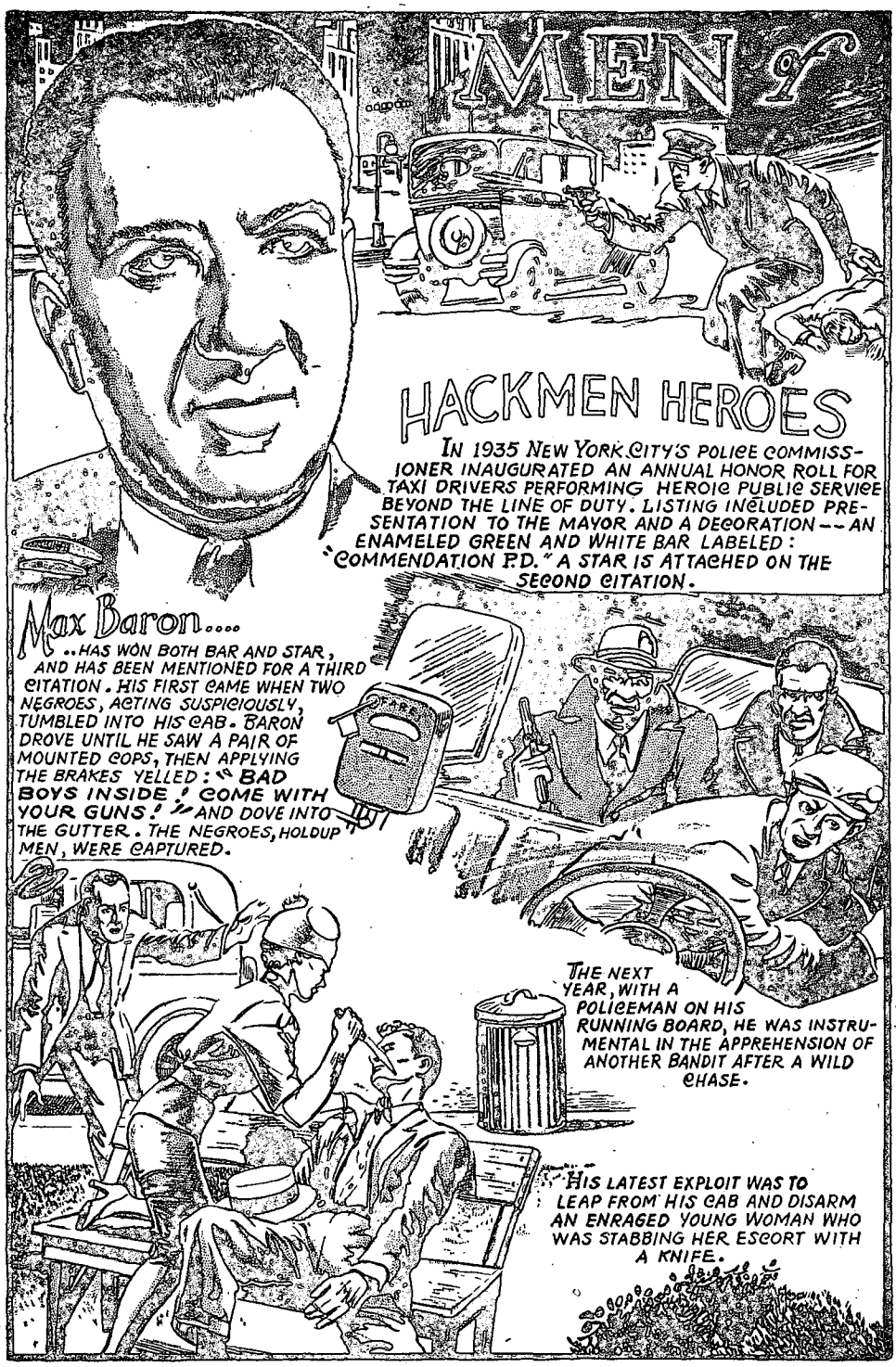
MEN of
HACKMEN HEROES
IN 1935 NEW YORK CITY'S POLICE COMMISSIONER INAUGURATED AN ANNUAL HONOR ROLL FOR TAXI DRIVERS PERFORMING HEROIC PUBLIC SERVICE BEYOND THE LINE OF DUTY. LISTING INCLUDED PRESENTATION TO THE MAYOR AND A DECORATION -- AN ENAMELED GREEN AND WHITE BAR LABELED: "COMMENDATION P.D." A STAR IS ATTACHED ON THE SECOND CITATION.
Max Baron....
..HAS WON BOTH BAR AND STAR, AND HAS BEEN MENTIONED FOR A THIRD CITATION. HIS FIRST CAME WHEN TWO NEGROES, ACTING SUSPICIOUSLY, TUMBLED INTO HIS CAB. BARON DROVE UNTIL HE SAW A PAIR OF MOUNTED COPS, THEN APPLYING THE BRAKES YELLED: "BAD BOYS INSIDE! COME WITH YOUR GUNS!" AND DOVE INTO THE GUTTER. THE NEGROES, HOLDUP MEN, WERE CAPTURED.
THE NEXT YEAR, WITH A POLICEMAN ON HIS RUNNING BOARD, HE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN THE APPREHENSION OF ANOTHER BANDIT AFTER A WILD CHASE.
HIS LATEST EXPLOIT WAS TO LEAP FROM HIS CAB AND DISARM AN ENRAGED YOUNG WOMAN WHO WAS STABBING HER ESCORT WITH A KNIFE.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

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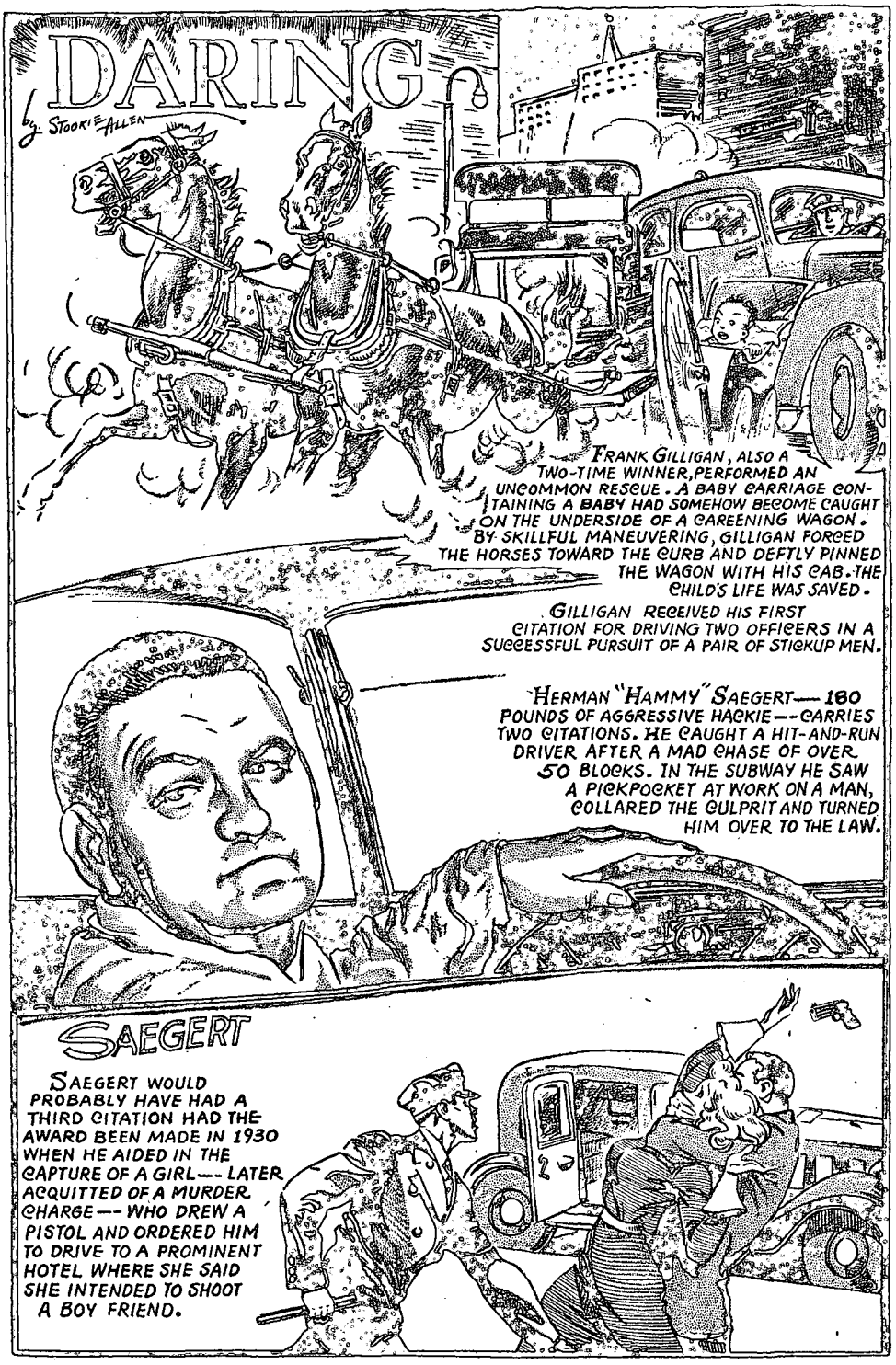
DARING
by STOOKIE ALLEN
FRANK GILLIGAN, ALSO A TWO-TIME WINNER, PERFORMED AN UNCOMMON RESCUE. A BABY CARRIAGE CONTAINING A BABY HAD SOMEHOW BECOME CAUGHT ON THE UNDERSIDE OF A CAREENING WAGON. BY SKILLFUL MANEUVERING, GILLIGAN FORCED THE HORSES TOWARD THE CURB AND DEFTLY PINNED THE WAGON WITH HIS CAB. THE CHILD'S LIFE WAS SAVED.
GILLIGAN RECEIVED HIS FIRST CITATION FOR DRIVING TWO OFFICERS IN A SUCCESSFUL PURSUIT OF A PAIR OF STICKUP MEN.
HERMAN "HAMMY" SAEGERT — 180 POUNDS OF AGGRESSIVE HACKIE — CARRIES TWO CITATIONS. HE CAUGHT A HIT-AND-RUN DRIVER AFTER A MAD CHASE OF OVER 50 BLOCKS. IN THE SUBWAY HE SAW A PICKPOCKET AT WORK ON A MAN, COLLARED THE CULPRIT AND TURNED HIM OVER TO THE LAW.
SAEGERT
SAEGERT WOULD PROBABLY HAVE HAD A THIRD CITATION HAD THE AWARD BEEN MADE IN 1930 WHEN HE AIDED IN THE CAPTURE OF A GIRL — LATER ACQUITTED OF A MURDER CHARGE — WHO DREW A PISTOL AND ORDERED HIM TO DRIVE TO A PROMINENT HOTEL WHERE SHE SAID SHE INTENDED TO SHOOT A BOY FRIEND.

Coming Soon: the Codonas—Royalty of the Big Top

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Captain Scanlon said seven words, and nodded to the sailors. Timmons' body slipped quickly back into the sea

Loot Lies Deep

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

Start now this fascinating novel of glamor and gorillas in search for gold on the high seas

LET me introduce myself: I'm Bat Mason, a newspaper man by profession, a sailor on the side. It was because I knew something about yachting that my managing editor handed me the crazy and perilous assignment I'm going to tell you about: I was to sail on the ketch *Condor* with a party of playboys and glamor gals who were all set to hunt for sunken gold.

Grace Taver, a society racketeer, had organized the thing. She had lined up Linda Haywood, the ranking glamor gal; Vicky Seymour, another cafe society celebrity, slightly faded; Arthur Hislop, an unpleasant nightclub specimen; and Buck Bosworth, millionaire, sportsman, and heavy drinker. Each of them had forked over ten grand to finance the treasure hunt.

Well, the setup looked no worse than phony until I discovered that Hoke Scanlon had been hired on as captain; Hoke, I knew, had served a stretch for second degree murder, and he was a thoroughly bad number.

TO MAKE things worse, Scanlon was supposed to hold the clue to the treasure. Some years before a South American politico had decamped with four million dollars in gold, and his ship had sunk off the coast of Venezuela in a hurricane. Hoke Scanlon claimed he'd located the wreck, had dived there and brought up some sample pesos.

He seemed really sincere about the treasure, but I didn't trust him. I didn't like the crew of thugs he'd taken on the *Condor;* I didn't like the way he was making time with the beautiful Linda Haywood.

We had trouble soon enough. The third night out I heard a scream from the wireless cabin. I got there in a hurry, to find the place spattered with blood, and empty; a

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trail of blood across the deck proved that the operator had gone overboard.

The radio man had been hired by Buck Bosworth, not by Scanlon; and it seemed pretty clear to me that Hoke wanted things so arranged that his maneuvers would not be reported immediately. What those maneuvers would be I couldn't guess, but I was betting that they'd be nasty. . . .

CHAPTER VII

WHAT FAR CRY

BUT I didn't have long to think, at that. Just a few minutes after I'd settled myself in my cabin there was a shout—"Got him!" I rushed on deck. They'd picked up poor Timmons' body at last, and were hauling him in.

He'd met violence, certainly; but there was no clue to what had happened to him. Anyway, no clue that Scanlon let anybody know about. He got the body ready for burial secretly in jig time.

. . . It was four nights later that they tried to get me. And they didn't miss it very far, either. Not very far at all.

There hadn't been any real trouble since the death of the radio operator, and we were all beginning to wonder if it hadn't been as Captain Scanlon insisted, that he had died as the result of some personal fight.

Scanlon went through all the motions, at least, of attempting to find the murderer, and put every man of the crew on the griddle. But he had no luck. Not a bit.

The morning after the killing we spoke a Bull Line freighter and Scanlon wigwagged to her that our wireless man had died and would they kindly report us. I know that is what he told them because I could read the signals.

An hour later he luffed the *Condor* up into the wind and slid the operator's canvas-shrouded body into the sea. There was no Bible aboard and none of us knew the service for burial at sea. So Scanlon just said, "May God have mercy on his soul," and gave the sailors the nod to lift the inboard end of the plank.

I happened to be standing beside Linda Haywood. She didn't cry, or make any sound. She just closed her eyes very tightly as the shapeless bundle disappeared over the rail; and then she went down to her cabin. I guess she cried then, all right, because at dinner her lids looked faintly red. But she looked pretty nice in spite of that.

We were having perfect weather and Hoke Scanlon was driving the *Condor* hard. When tropic squalls came up he would take in the Genoa, and break out the working jib, but the moment it was over he would call out the watch to put up the guinney again.

Inch by inch the penciled line on the chart slanted downward toward the Windward Passage. The navigation was, of course, none of my business; but I watched the chart carefully, and I had an idea that Buck Bosworth, too, knew where we were just about all the time.

I'll ungrudgingly hand Hoke Scanlon this: he was as good a navigator as he was a sailor. We hit the anvil-shaped landfall of El Yunque de Baracoa right on the nose and a few hours later we could see Cape Maysi Light, the yellow column which marks the extreme easterly tip of Cuba. The easterly trades had steadied and we eased the sheets to run down the Windward Passage.

We had hardly moved our own length on the new course before he had all hands breaking out an immense spinnaker and you could feel the *Condor* surge ahead as that huge sail filled. He held well off Cape Dame Marie, the westernmost tip of Haiti, but cut inside the flashing white light of Navassa Island.

The next morning we were out of the Windward Pasage and were heading southeast by a little east down across the sapphire stretches of the Caribbean.

THE night they tried to get me I had been on deck with Linda. The moon was pretty big and there was lots of phosphorescence on the water and Linda's gardenia perfume came sweetly to my nostrils on the warm sea air.

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There was hardly a sound on deck except the lapping of a halyard somewhere up the mainmast.

There was none of the vibration you find on a motor-driven yacht—just the sensation of silent forward speed you get only on a sailboat. If you like the sea you know what a fine feeling that is. If you don't like the sea, there is no way I could properly describe it to you.

Linda and I were sitting in deep wicker chairs in the shelter of the deck house. The rest of the crowd was down in the lounge, which was okay by me. We could see the white figure of the quartermaster at the wheel and an occasional blurred glimpse of his face as he peered into the lighted binnacle.

Garside, the mate, was on watch. He was pacing, restless as a cat, from rail to rail checking the helmsman by the stars, with only an occasional stop for a glance at the lighted compass card. And somewhere forward was the bow lookout, but we could not see him up there in the moon-splashed darkness.

The sailors of both watches were below; now and then we heard the strains of dance music floating aft from their radio in the fo'c'sle.

Sitting there, lazy, content, silent, gratefully conscious that Linda was there, too, I felt as if she and I were happily alone in a word of darkly rushing water, of humming canvas and of long-swinging stars. A pretty nice world, that.

We didn't say much, hadn't said much since we had come up here after coffee. I was afraid to say much, afraid to ask the many questions that were in my mind, lest I break the spell that was upon us. Nobody knew better than I, a hard-boiled newspaper man, just how fragile was this gossamer web which tonight, under the Southern Cross, seemed to link us together.

But I was grateful for it now, even if it was to last only a few days.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see her there, young, slim, lovelier than any girl had a right to be, her piquant profile cameo-clear in the silver illumination of the star-dusted night. I did not speak.

After a long, long time, she turned her head slowly and looked straight at me.

"Bat," she said, in that rich, low voice of hers, "you know something none of the rest of us knows. Are—are we safe aboard this yacht?"

"That's something I don't know," I said, making no effort to fence with her. "I wish I did." And when she made no answer to that, I said, "Listen—if you don't want to go on with this, just tell me. I think I can get Mrs. Taver to put into the nearest port and drop you off."

She was silent for so long a time I looked at her, wondering if she were asleep. But she wasn't. Her eyes, beneath their incredibly long lashes, were big and round as she watched the Southern Cross swing against the masthead.

"No," she said, tiredly. "I started this and I'll see it through."

I leaned forward in my chair. "Tell me," I said in a rougher tone than I knew, "why you, America's glamor girl, ever got mixed up in a racket like this."

"You think it is a racket?" she countered in a tone which indicated that she did not care whether it was or not.

"Yes, I think so, and I haven't an ounce of proof of it," I said. "And the funny part of it is, I wouldn't wonder at all if the treasure is right there, exactly where Scanlon says it is."

"And you still think it's a racket?"

"I still thinks it's a racket."

"WELL, I don't much care whether it is or not," she said. "Grace Taver hit me with it at exactly the right time. A day or two before and I'd probably have laughed at her, at the idea of leaving New York right at the height of the season."

She twisted around in her chair, her softly-rounded body oddly tense.

"Look, Bat," she said, tautly, "I am twenty years old. Twenty and two months. I came out the winter I was 18. In these two years I've been whirled around. I've been photographed for all the magazines.

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I've learned what every kind of a drink tastes like. I've been made love to by everybody from Yale freshmen to lecherous old goats who have rushed every deb since McKinley's inauguration.

"Don't ask me if I like it. Mostly I do. After all, it's nice to be flattered, nice to know that you're a success in your job—and my job, the only job I've ever known, was to be a successful debutante. That's what I was brought up for, educated for and—"

Her voice suddenly faltered, choked up. She pushed herself to her feet, and stood there, swinging easily to the motion of the *Condor*.

"I just suddenly got very, very tired of it," she said, "and this voyage seemed like a good vacation. Grace and Vicky and Art were so enthusiastic about it that they sold me, and I'm glad they did." She shrugged and added, "And I'll probably be even more glad to get back into the swing at the end of it."

"Did your father and mother approve of this kind of a jaunt?" I asked.

"They—well, Dad's in China, and he wouldn't have much to say about it anyway. He and my mother are divorced, you know. My mother threw a fit at first. But Grace talked her into letting me come. Mother's a little hard up right now and she wouldn't mind if I brought home a nice big bag of gold."

Somehow I gathered the impression that this lovely girl was not being altogether frank with me, that she had some other reason for joining the syndicate and making the voyage than she had told.

It was, as a matter of fact, none of my business. But there was something that was my business. Or if it wasn't, I'd make it so.

"You asked if you were safe aboard this yacht," I said. "There's just one thing. Don't let Captain Scanlon get too interested in you."

I saw her slim figure stiffen and I knew I had stuck my neck out again.

"That," she said, coolly, "wasn't the sort of advice I wanted."

"You can't pick and choose the kind of advice you want," I retorted, "when you ask me if you're safe on this yacht."

"You think I'm encouraging Captain Scanlon?"

"Captain Scanlon," I said, "doesn't need any encouragement. What he needs is discouragement, and big hunks of it."

"I like him," she said, flatly.

"Now, isn't that just too sweet!" I snapped. "Listen, you think just because you can handle Yale freshmen and lecherous old goats who rush each season's debs that you can handle a man like Hoke Scanlon?"

"I don't know," she said, with maddening calm.

"I'll save you the trouble of finding out," I said. "I'll tell you. You can't."

She stood there a moment longer, looking prettier than ever in her bright anger. The moonlight washed down on her, its silver lights and shadows emphasizing the clear contours of her face and the soft curves of her supple body. The fragrance of her perfume ran with the night wind and stirred my pulses almost beyond bearing. She turned to look at me, her lips parted for some angry retort.

But what she was about to say, I never knew, for her body suddenly went rigid and her blue eyes expanded as they stopped on something — somebody — beyond my right shoulder.

I WHEELED just in time to see the mate step swiftly into the deep blackness behind the motor lifeboat. He had moved away from his post aft and was much closer to us than he should have been.

In four long steps I was there behind the lifeboat. His starched uniform stood out clearly in the darkness.

"Mr. Garside," I snapped, angry blood throbbing in my wrists and temples, "ever since I was a small boy, I've hated eavesdroppers."

He made no answer, but I saw his big figure grow taut.

"Next time I'm talking to someone,"

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I went on, almost hoping he would start something, "and you want to hear, just ask me and I'll let you draw up a chair."

I couldn't see much of his face in the darkness, but by the tightening lines of his body I knew he was getting mad.

"I wasn't listening in," he declared. "I was just inspecting the lashings here on the davits."

"You choose a nice time," I said, levelly.

"Bat," said Linda, beside me. She tugged at my sleeve. "Bat, why must you always—"

"Mr. Garside," I cut in, "it's just fine that you weren't eavesdropping. You might pass the word along to anybody you know that I don't like uninvited listeners. And"—I let my voice slide into hardness—"and whenever I see one, I do my best to slap his ears down."

Linda came around between us, and I guess she was just in time to prevent the mate from taking a swing at me. She put both her hands against my chest. She gave me a push that had astonishing strength behind it. And beyond her glistening dark head I saw the mate turn away and walk back to the quartermaster at the wheel.

"You're just looking for trouble, aren't you?" Linda said in a furious voice.

The bright anger seeped out of me and I was able to smile down into her small oval face.

"Not at all," I said, grinning. "I promised my grandmother when I left home at the age of eight that I'd never raise my hand in anger and—"

"Oh," she burst out, "why do you make everything so difficult?"

And without waiting to see whether there was any answer to that, which there certainly was not, she turned and almost ran to the companionway.

Thoughtfully I watched as her slim figure disappeared down the steps. I looked aft and saw Garside's tall, rangy figure near the wheel. The man's face was turned toward the lighted companionway where Linda had just vanished. Then he squinted up at the set of the mainsail and murmured some order to the helmsman.

I sat down on a sailbox just forward of the mainmast, too restless to go below. I went over everything Linda had said about Hoke Scanlon.

So she liked him, did she? Well, although I didn't like that at all, I could understand it. He was no café-crawler, no sweet-smelling dancing man.

He was tough, hairy-chested, vital. There was a wildness in his eyes that she would never see in the eyes of the men who took her around in New York. He was a new type to her, and she was probably good and tired of the type she knew.

Propinquity, I told myself, was the thing really to be feared here on the *Condor*. She had a dozen, a hundred, encounters with him every day on the circumscribed decks of the yacht. The suave, sophisticated background of her everyday life would seem a million miles away, and under the savage sun of tropic waters it would not take her long to forget she was America's most publicized glamor girl.

Nor would it take her long to discover that she was, after all, just a woman.

And why had Garside been snooping? Had Hoke Scanlon put him up to it, or had he thought it up himself?

Suddenly, as I sat there brooding about the mate, I turned and looked behind me. I saw no one—Garside was still aft—but the impression persisted that someone had been standing close behind me. I tried to tell myself that I was just jittery tonight, but it was no go. So after a while I went down to bed.

Now, thinking back, I am sure that by leaving the deck when I did I saved my own life. Unquestionably the man who visited me later was up there then, watching me and waiting for his chance to take me.

CHAPTER VIII

SLEEP LIGHTLY TONIGHT

I HAD been asleep for about two hours, I guess, when I found myself sitting bolt upright in my berth, my eyes wide

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open, my ears straining, every nerve-end in my body shrieking a warning against some danger I could neither hear nor see.

Somebody was in my cabin, lost in the velvet darkness which concealed everything.

My first impulse was to call out. Lying there, all my senses alert, I realized that the silent, invisible person was coming toward my berth. He had closed the passageway door, for no light came from outside. Had he, I wondered, locked it on the inside with the passkey he must have used to gain entry?

I waited one more instant, trying to place the fellow in the room. Then I rolled off my built-in berth. My down-thrust arm quieted the thump as my body slipped to the thick carpet below.

I inched myself backward until I lay at full length, my shoulders and flanks jammed hard against the chest of drawers upon which the springs of my berth rested. I pulled in my breath and made myself as thin as possible against that knobby barrier.

There I waited, ears and eyes reaching out to locate the presence I knew was approaching.

Now, and for the first time, I actually heard something. The faintest of scufflings in the thick-piled rug, the shallow breathing of a man trying to make no noise at all. Slowly, gradually, two columns of blackness developed out of the darkness close by my face. Legs.

My nerves twitched and jerked, so eager was I to reach out and grab those legs; but some new-found patience persuaded me to wait. The prowler scraped his feet ahead another inch. I could hear the soft rustling of clothes.

From somewhere above my head came a muffled blow and an odd ripping noise. At the same time one of those inky black legs lunged forward and thumped against my chest.

Now there was no more need for quiet. I went into convulsive action. My two tough-fibered arms wrapped themselves around those anonymous legs. With all the strength of my back muscles I threw myself away from that chest of drawers, surged against those legs and pushed them out from under their owner.

There was a quick gasp of indrawn breath as the man toppled and fell heavily in the darkness. I found myself beneath a body whose corded muscles were as strong as my own. Something swished through the air and struck into the carpet with a heavy thud.

The man squirmed wildly in my arms but I surged sidewise and began to chop up at him with short, savage blows. Each one that landed drove a belly-deep grunt from the unseen lips of my enemy.

In all that time there was no sound. No sound, that is, which could trickle through the closed door or compete with the rushing of the waves outside the open porthole.

It would have been easy for me to scream for help. One full-lunged yell would have roused the entire afterguard. And don't ask me to tell you why I didn't when I knew I was in trouble right up to my eyebrows. It just didn't occur to me, that's all.

I felt my left fist skid across the cheekbone of the guy who had somehow squirmed around until he was on top of me like a drunken jockey. Instantly I was rewarded by a sweeping smash to the chin which caused bright sparks to dance in my eyeballs.

The prowler, rolling sidewise, managed to get his knees up between my body and his. With the full strength of his thighs he brought his knees down, roweling my belly with agonizing force and breaking the hold I had on him.

THERE was a quick scurry of fabric against the carpet and I knew the other had scrambled to his feet. I lurched to mine. The man was slugging wildly there in the darkness, trying to fight his way to the door.

I bumped past him, came up against the bulkhead and ran the flat of my hand swiftly across the painted surface, desper-

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ately trying to find the light switch. Two arms snaked around my neck and began to throttle me. One arm slid a trifle, ground its way under my chin and dragged its full weight against my Adam's apple. Instantly my breath was shut off, as by the slamming of a heavy door.

And it was astonishing how swiftly that wicked pressure began to drain the strength out of my body. I have read somewhere that a man could last three or three and a half minutes without fresh air in his lungs.

Perhaps so. Perhaps it was the closing off of my jugular vein that was doing the job. But immediately sharp knife-stabs of pain jabbed at my brain and my lungs began to burn up.

I bent forward, hoping to roll the man over my shoulders and so break that killing hold. But my own head banged sharply against the bulkhead and that stopped that. Like the Old Man of the Sea, the other clung on, dragging all his weight against the forearm which, straight across my throat, was forcing my head back even as it closed off my windpipe and stopped my very heart's blood in its course from my brain.

If my head wouldn't go forward, perhaps it would go backward. I tried to jerk it that way so the back of my skull might bash in the face of the man who was, instant by instant, killing me. But the throttling arms did not allow any backward play. I could move my head only an inch or two, and that was not enough. Not nearly enough.

There would be only a few seconds now. A part of my brain, seemingly detached from the rest of me, told me that. Then I would be dead. Or so nearly dead that the results would be about the same.

Frantically I lifted my right foot, planted it firmly against the wall at about hip-level. Then, knowing it would be my very last try, I put everything I had into a tremendous push. My body straightened out with the impetus of that last desperate effort. I—and the man whose arms were choking me—flew backward as if we were propelled by a gigantic catapault.

We went down together, he hitting the floor first. He had dragged me with him. And when we hit, that deadly pressure went away from my throat.

For a long moment or two I didn't know what had happened to the guy, and I didn't care. The only important thing in all the world was that I was now able to gulp some air into my tortured lungs, that the blinding agony was fading out of my brain.

I rolled over and lay on my stomach, gasping for air and for more air, realizing only vaguely, disinterestedly, that he had scrambled to his feet and, by the sound, was staggering toward the door.

Slowly, painfully, I got to my hands and knees, then pushed myself upright. I heard the rasping sound of metal sliding across metal, then a soft jar; and I knew he had opened the door and darted out into the passageway.

I tottered to the bulkhead and at last found the light switch. This was a mistake. I should have gone to the door first. The light hit me like a slap in the face. I wrenched at the knob and got the door open. I reeled into the passageway and peered up and down its length. There was nobody there.

I started aft, heading toward the lounge and, beyond that, the dog house and the deck. But I realized there was another companionway at the other end of the passageway which led up to the deck just aft of the engine room bulkhead.

And—well, suppose I got up there on deck, careening around in the wind-swept darkness. I would be just asking for it, wouldn't I?

I don't suppose I'm afraid of any more things than most men. Perhaps less afraid than a good many. But I'm here to tell you that careening around on the deck up there, unarmed and in my pajamas, suddenly appeared very unattractive.

THE door to Number 3 opened. At first just a crack, then a little wider. That, I remembered, was Art Hislop's cabin. I

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could see the dim white oval of his face in the darkness of his room as he peered out at me.

"Are you drunk, Mason?" he asked in a low, indignant voice.

"No, I'm not drunk," I snapped at him.

"Then what are you doing? You look drunk."

"It isn't a damned bit of your business," I snarled, "but now you're asking, somebody just tried to kill me."

I could hear him sniffing suspiciously. "I smell liquor on your breath," he said. "You're boiled. Go back to bed. And try not to wake anyone else."

He retreated into his darkness and closed the door. For a moment I was sore enough to kick the panel in. Then I remembered the three or four nice big drinks I had had before turning in. After all, then, who could blame him for thinking me drunk?

On a big yacht, with all the surroundings of luxurious living, with stewards to bring you champagne cocktails at the ringing of a bell, it isn't reasonable to believe that a murderer prowls the passageways, hunting down the owner's guests.

No, not even when one member of the crew has gone overboard already, leaving only blood stains behind.

Slowly I went back to my cabin. I upended one of the big wicker chairs and jammed it under the door knob. I took out the bottle and poured myself one long jolt after another. Weariness flowed over me in a scalding wave and all the places I had been hit began to ache at the same time.

I walked over to my built-in berth. I sat down on the edge of it, fighting down an impulse to be sick. The guy who had jumped me had been plenty strong. I had thought I was in pretty good physical trim, but I was just about pooped out.

My eyes suddenly focused upon something I saw on the floor. Or, to be exact, *in* the floor. There was a knife standing upright, its gleaming shaft driven an inch deep through the carpet and into the hardwood veneer which covered the steel plates beneath. A hard pull was required to jerk it out.

I held it wonderingly in my hand, remembering a heavy thud I had heard just after I had tangled with the prowler. I remembered something else, a queer stabbing, ripping, sound while I had waited there on the floor, my back against the drawers under the berth.

I walked back to the berth and stared down at what I saw there. Just below my pillow, exactly where my exposed throat would have been, was a cut which sliced through the sheet deep into the mattress.

Balancing the knife in my palm, I tried to adjust my incredulous mind to the fact that I had missed having my throat nicely cut only by seconds, and by the wholly instinctive act of rolling off the berth and waiting for the prowler there on the floor.

I marched over to the call bell and stood for an instant with my thumb hovering over the button. Then I turned away. What good would it do to call Hoke Scanlon and to tell him that fun was fun and all that, but there were limits even to my patience? He would just deny everything. That's what he would do unless he were out of the mood for denying, and had come to the conclusion that he might as well show his hand.

And look, brother, when I peeked at Hoke Scanlon's hole cards I wanted to be ready for big gobs of assorted trouble. I certainly wasn't ready now. All I had was a knife.

I couldn't see myself being very handy with a knife when trouble came. I'd probably throw the thing away and start working with my fists. And working with my fists wouldn't be too good if Hoke Scanlon had a gun. Hoke Scanlon probably had a gun. Except when he was in the pen he probably always had a gun on, even under his pajamas when he slept.

So what good would it do to call the steward and to have him bring Hoke Scanlon down to me?

I turned back to the locker and took a couple of long pulls out of that bottle

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which should have made my hair all fall out. To this day I don't remember climbing back into bed. I had three or four more drinks and then I either went to sleep or just fell unconscious, I don't know which. Nor do I care.

CHAPTER IX

WHO'S DRUNK NOW?

MRS. TAVER came barging up to me just before lunch next day. I was brooding in the shade of the mains'l, feeling terrible—and mighty sorry for myself.

She stood before me, all the facets of her jewelry catching the sun and hurting my eyes. Light glanced off her make-up as it would from the enamel of a ship's hull. And her hair, which was supposed to be golden, looked as if it needed a new plating job.

To me, with a hangover and at that time in the morning, Mrs. Taver didn't look so good.

"Mr. Mason," she said in a gritty voice, "Jay Hennig, the owner of your paper, didn't tell me that you were a drinking man."

Wearily I pushed myself out of my chair. After all, she was a lady. Or anyway, a woman.

"Did he tell you I was twenty-nine years old, and that I had all my own teeth except one in the back, and that I don't believe in the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow?" I asked her.

Her face went hard. And when Grace Taver's face went hard it was something to see. It would have dulled the cutting edge of a cold chisel. She had been through a lot in her time, that old gal.

"So you're going to be insolent?" she said, her words dropping as brittle as slivers of broken glass.

"This isn't my day for being bright," I groaned, "so let's start all over again. Do I drink? Yes, and usually in moderation. Do I get drunk? Not often. Did you ask me—or have my managing editor ask me—if I was a white ribboner? No.

"Was I drunk last night. Not when Art Hislop told you I was. And if you want to bring that dough-faced monkey here to confront me, I'll prove it to you—just before I push his front teeth into his back hair."

But apparently I didn't sell her a bill of goods. She waited me out, and when I had had my say, she had hers. "Next time you hit the bottle, I'll put you ashore," she declared.

That was practically the payoff. A few minutes ago I'd have said I was all through laughing for life. But I laughed now. I laughed until tears came to my eyes and I had to dig for a handkerchief to swab them away.

"If that's a promise," I said as soon as I could stop laughing, "call me a steward, will you? I'll hit a bottle so fast it'll make your head swim."

So far as I know, nobody had ever accused Grace Taver of dumbness. Of other things, yes. But not dumbness. Her small eyes narrowed as she searched my face.

"I might have made a mistake," she said, slowly.

"You mean that shifty-eyed, fair-headed so-and-so, Art Hislop," I said. "He made the mistake."

"Call your own shots," she said. "All right, so you weren't drunk last night. Exactly what did happen, then?"

"Nothing much, except somebody tried to cut my throat."

The natural color went out from under the patina of her cheeks, leaving her face like a Benda mask.

"The radio operator, then," she murmured, "wasn't just a private brawl."

"I never thought it was," I said. "Listen, Mrs. Taver, you told me you first met Captain Scanlon when he applied for a job."

"Yes."

"How did he happen to apply for the job? Did you ask some yacht broker or uniform outfit to find you a skipper, or—"

"I told you. I hadn't intended to put the *Condor* into commission this season.

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But Art Hislop brought this Captain Scanlon—"

"Ah!" I breathed.

"—and then this matter of the treasure hunt came up."

"I'm getting somewhere now," I said, quietly. "Listen, did Hislop pay his full ten grand into the syndicate?"

Her lip curled. "There's ten grand, in cash, in the syndicate for him. In his name. But he didn't put it in himself."

"Who put it in for him?" I demanded—but I had it pretty clear in my own mind as I asked.

"You guess," she said, contemptuously.

SHE started to turn away and wheeled. "Bat," she said in a shaky voice, "what are we going to do? We can't have anyone else murdered! Have you any idea at all who it was?"

"If I had," I replied, grimly, "I'd settle things right now."

"Perhaps we'd better call the whole thing off," she said, hopelessly.

"I wonder if you could?" I hazarded.

"I'll find out!" she snapped. And then, suddenly, she seemed go grow older right before me. She made a queer little gesture with her bejeweled hands.

"If I do," she said, drearily, "I'm ruined, definitely. I owe nearly half a million dollars. I borrowed it last year to back Sammy Griswald and his orchestra in a night club. It laid an egg and I've got to pay the money back. If there's treasure where we're going, I've got to get it. What shall I do, Bat?"

She looked pretty pathetic, the last woman in the world I'd have expected to see looking like that. Remember the pictures you saw of her riding the tasseled elephant at a circus party she organized over there on the Riviera? Remember those roto pictures of her after she had won the grand prize for the most gorgeous costume at The Surf Club gala? Remember—

Oh, nuts! It is pitiful to watch anyone who has been at the top start on the long, steep slide toward the bottom.

Just as I was trying to decide what to advise her, Hoke Scanlon came up. He had been watching us from the taffrail.

"Mr. Mason," he asked in a business-like voice, "what happened to your sheet and mattress last night?"

The guy had guts. Sore as I was, I had to grin in admiration.

"I was thinking of asking you, Captain," I replied, quietly. "Couldn't you guess?"

I heard a faint hiss of sharply indrawn breath from Grace Taver. But the captain did not even glance at her.

"What are you doing," he asked icily, "playing a guessing game? If so, I'm tired of it already. Your steward reported that your sheet and mattress looked as if they had been cut. They *have* been cut. How drunk were you last night?"

"I've been wondering about that myself," I drawled. "Didn't Mr. Hislop describe my condition to you?"

"It's only fair to tell you, Mr. Mason," he said, evenly, "that if you go on damaging ship's gear, I'll cut off your liquor."

That got through to me. As I've already said, my temper was ragged and my head felt like the perisphere.

"Scanlon," I snarled, "you seem pretty sure of yourself, or you wouldn't be sounding off like this." I stopped all pretense of grinning. "I'm plenty sick of the things that have been going on aboard this yacht. Already there's been one unexplained murder.

"And last night there came near being another—which would probably have been unexplained, too. Last night somebody got into my cabin and did his best to cut my throat."

Scanlon stared at me with a flat, unblinking regard. Not one muscle of his face moved, yet it seemed somehow to harden to the consistency of stainless steel.

"Why?" he cracked.

I almost laughed at that. "You tell me," I suggested.

"Did you see him?" he demanded.

"No, but I felt him," I said, almost enjoying this now.

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"How was he dressed?" Scanlon asked in a clipped voice. "Pajamas? Yachting jacket? A sailor's blouse?"

A SMART question. I had to admit it. Now, thinking back, I could not remember. But I was sure of this: The intruder was not wearing the starched white uniform of a ship's officer.

But that did not really matter. Certainly Hoke, if it had been he, wouldn't come in to cut my throat all dressed up in whites. He had more sense than that. So we weren't getting anywhere.

"I wouldn't know about his clothes, Hoke," I said, "but—"

"Wait," he interrupted. "What have you done to make anyone want to kill you?"

I was getting sick of all this double-talk.

"I've been a newspaper man," I rasped. "And in my time, man and boy, I've learned about people. A lot of things. If I told all I know, it might do a great big piece of damage."

Even that didn't throw him for a loss. He stuck out his bristly chin.

"Are you trying to tell me you think I did it?" he snapped.

The sheer nerve of him almost set me back on my heels. The fact is, it worried me, too. I didn't like his being that sure of himself, when not so long ago he had been thorougly worried about my spilling what I knew of his record.

"Hoke," I said, very gently, "let me make a suggestion. You'd be wise to start taking very good care of me, because if anything should happen to me, you'd better sink this yacht and disappear from the sight of man. Why? Well, the very first time this boat goes on the ways for a complete overhaul, the workmen will find a letter addressed to the nearest chief of police.

"And I'm a writer, Hoke. I know how to write things so they are convincing. I could do a fine job on you, and you know it. So keep me well, Hoke, keep me well!"

I knew I had just thought up a swell idea when I watched his expression go wild.

"Mason," he breathed, "you are sure asking for it!"

"Captain!" Mrs. Taver bleated. "You are forgetting your place!"

Hoke Scanlon stared at her. I could see a little pulse jumping in his throat and his pupils were expanding, like the eyes of a cat going into darkness. So it was coming, was it? I shifted my feet a couple of inches and got myself all set.

Did I say that I was six feet one, and that I was big and red-necked and had shoulders like an ice man? Yes, and arms to go with the shoulders. Well, Hoke was no peewee either; but I was mad enough now to know that if I hit him first, that would be the only time I would have to hit him.

But I did not hit him. I didn't have to. Or, rather, he didn't give me a good excuse. He let his breath run out in a long sigh and all his muscles went lax.

He pulled his eyes away from Mrs. Taver, turned on his heel and walked forward to disappear down the companionway leading to his cabin.

Mrs. Taver's face looked at least sixty years old. She tried to put a cigarette in a long red holder and kept missing the thing a mile. I took it away from her and put it in myself.

"You called him Hoke," she said, unsteadily. "He called you Mason."

"Well?"

"That means you knew him before you came aboard."

"So did your syndicate-member, Art Hislop," I said right back at her. "I think it's about time you put that baby on a hot plate and found out why he recommended Hoke Scanlon for this job."

And with the politest bow I could manage I left her. I had a letter to write. I was never one to lug a grouch around, never one to brood about revenge. But if Hoke Scanlon managed somehow to give me the bump, I wanted to plant something that would crack his neck, or fry him, or fill him full of poison gas, depend-

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ing upon the law at that particular moment.

CHAPTER X

FOR DEEPER BURIAL

I WAS writing the letter on my portable when there was a knock on my cabin door. I still had that stinking knife. I upended it and slid it up my sleeve before I said, "Come in."

And I took the letter out of the machine, too. I folded it and slipped it in my pocket, togther with the carbon.

It was Buck Bosworth who entered. I was disappointed. I'd been expecting Art Hislop. Or maybe Vicky Seymour Buck walked over to my locker, poured a drink into the water tumbler and passed the layout to me. I waved the tumbler aside and took a pull at the bottle. I needed it. First today.

"Who tried to cut your throat?" Buck asked.

"If I were sure," I said, "I'd go and cut his right now. I'm sick of being pushed around."

"Grace has gone to bed with the heebie-jeebies."

"That'll all right," I said, not caring. "Maybe next time she'll be more careful about her employees—and her associates, too."

He rolled his eye at me. "Nothing personal in that?"

"Hardly. Why should you want to kill me?"

"Well, come right down to it, why should anybody want to kill you?"

"If Hoke Scanlon did it, or had it done, I can guess. If it was anyone else, I can't."

"Isn't it about time," he asked, "that you told me about Hoke Scanlon?"

I gave that a little thought.

"Not quite yet, Buck," I said at last.

"Okay," he said. "But I'm getting pretty sick of seeing him give the eye to Linda."

"If he keeps on," I said, my tone hardening, "I'll tell you what I know about him. Is there any danger there?"

"There might be," Buck said. "She's pretty tired of the kind of man she knows. One of them gave her a raw deal just before she signed up for this cruise, which is probably why she did it. She was engaged to him, I hear, and she found that he practically had a harem and was going to marry her for her money so he could get his bills paid.

"This Scanlon is rough and tough—the other was soft and sweet. The danger is in the contrast. He's undoubtedly the first one of his type she's ever seen, and in spite of all the rushing around she's done, she's really just a kid. Think back to what you were at her age."

"I warned her last night and she got mad," I said.

"If you have enough on him, Scanlon's the one to warn," Buck advised.

"Art Hislop recommended him to Mrs. Taver," I said.

"That rat."

"How is he a rat?" I asked.

"He just is. It comes naturally to him. He has an income of two or three grand a year from his mother's trust fund. It all goes for taxis and flowers and things like that."

"And his rent and food? Where does the money come for these?" I asked. "And clothes, too? It must cost a lot to run with your mob."

"I suppose he bets stock tips, and pulls an occasional commission deal. There are a lot of guys hanging on the edge of society just that way. And Art doesn't do so badly. He has an apartment on Park Avenue and now and then takes a trip somewhere. Around the world last time, I heard."

"Vicky Seymour is nuts about him," I hazarded.

"And he'd give her the old brush-off in a minute if Linda would give him a tumble."

"So that's it? And while Vicky advances the ten grand for his syndicate membership in this treasure hunt, he tries to make time with Linda?"

"Yeah. Linda's a better catch, and that

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mug could use her money and her position. Especially her money. He never buys a meal except breakfast. He comes from a good old family and gets invited out to luncheons and dinners every day, so he gets along."

"A nice lad! Grace Taver has already cleaned up thirty grand or so on this charter," I said. "Win, lose or draw on the treasure, she still has her thirty thousand. Hislop thought up the deal. The chances are he's getting a cut on the profits, eh?"

Buck nodded. He got up, helped himself to another drink and looked down at me, grinning ruefully. "I told Scanlon I couldn't repair the radio," he said.

"Not a bad idea."

"But I might be able to do it on the sly. It's mostly a case of connections being torn loose. I could trace down the circuit and hook it up again in eight or ten hours."

"You must be nuts. How would you get down there, do all that work and get back without one of the crew seeing you?"

And when he did not answer, I went on. "And what messages would you send out that would be worth taking such chances for? The only thing I'd like to find out is how well and how long Scanlon and Hislop knew one another before Art took Scanlon to Mrs. Taver and recommended him for this job. But that isn't worth the risk of fixing the radio."

"I know a private detective agency that might be able to dig it up," Buck offered.

"My advice," I said, "is to forget the radio."

"I guess it's good advice," he sighed, and left the room.

I PUT the letter back in the portable and finished it. I did a fairish good job of it, if I do say so. It was long.

I told about Hoke Scanlon's career as a rum- alien- and drug-runner in the Caribbean and in the Gulf of Mexico. I advised the reader to look up the files on his trial and of the stink after he had been pardoned out of Alcatraz. I outlined all I knew of this treasure hunt racket, and when I put it down on paper I could see for myself it didn't look so good.

I told of the murder of the radio operator and of Hoke's refusal to find a man to replace him. I gave the details of the attack on me. I suggested that if I disappeared on this voyage there would be something about it in the papers and in the yachting magazines.

I closed with the suggestion if that any shipwright or painter found this letter he was to turn it over to the nearest chief of police. The matter would then be for the authorities to handle, which I was confident they would do.

I put the carbon in my pocket. I folded the letter and slipped it into an envelope. I pulled the bottom drawer completely out of the chest of drawers which made a foundation for my built-in berth.

There was, as I expected, a little space between the bottom of this drawer and the flooring. So I dropped the envelope on the floor, slid the drawer over it and was satisfied.

The chances were a thousand to one that nobody would ever explore that spot until the yacht went to a shipyard for a complete overhaul. Then they would paint that space to prevent dry rot—and would find the letter which would avenge me.

I went back on deck. Hoke had resumed his watch. He saw me coming, stopped his pacing back and forth.

"Hoke," I said, "I've been doing a bit of writing. And as I was working along, some questions occurred to me. The papers said the *Ulvik* went down with all hands. How was it they never reported your rescuing the lad who told you about the treasure?"

"They did report it. But the story was a dead one then and they gave it only an inch or two of space. I had the clipping. I showed it to Mrs. Taver when I was telling her about the treasure."

"Why didn't I see it?"

"I wouldn't know. Maybe she lost it."

"Was the rescued man one of the

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Ulvik's engineers?" I watched him closely.

Hoke Scanlon's eyes were narrowing, his face hardening into a dark, hateful mask.

"I've forgotten what he was," he said, almost in a snarl.

"I must put a postscript on my letter," I said, gently.

"A postscript on what letter?" he snapped.

"On the original copy of the letter I've already hidden in a place where it will never be found until they tear the yacht apart for a general overhaul. Sooner or later, you know, they'll have to do that or else she'll develop dry rot and fall apart."

"All right," he said, grimly, "sooner or later they'll find the letter. So what?"

"So I'm going to add something to it. I'm going to suggest, just in case something happens to me, that the police do a little hunting in the records. As I remember your case, you went to the pen for killing the third engineer of the freighter *Goldwich,* a man named Swenson, which has a Scandinavian sound to me."

"That's right," snapped Scanlon.

"You escaped having your neck stretched because you claimed self-defense and the D.A. couldn't establish a motive. Now, wouldn't it be interesting if they could trace back and find that the bird you rescued from the *Ulvik*—a Norwegian tramp—happened to be named Swenson, instead of Smith, as you told me, and if he happened also to be an engineer?

"Getting rid of the only one in the world beside yourself who knew where the *Ulvik* and her treasure were located. Boy, wouldn't that be a swell motive?"

HIS expression did not change. I wished it would. That lug could certainly put on an ugly puss. I hauled the carbon out of my pocket and handed it to him.

"That's a copy of the letter I've already written and hidden away," I told him. "I know yachts. And when I tell you that you'll just have to pull the *Condor* to pieces to find it, you'd better believe me.

"Behave yourself, and when we get back to Miami I'll dig the original of that letter out of its hiding place and give it to you. Keep on the way you're going now, or let anything happen to me, and my ghost will come popping out some day to haunt you. I don't think you'd care to sit through another murder trial, especially with the information my ghost will give the D.A. to work on. So you'd better take pretty good care to keep me in excellent health."

He read the carbon by the light of the binnacle. He tore it into tiny shreds, walked to the lee rail and threw them overboard.

"Let's see," he mused, his voice gentle, his eyes hard as chips of gunmetal, "if I were to try to hide a letter so it wouldn't be found until, say, they pulled her out of the water for an overhaul, where would I put it? In a little bottle in the bilge, maybe. Under the floorboards, perhaps. In a—"

He broke off suddenly and swiveled his glittering black eyes at me.

"One thing you forgot, Mason," he said, slowly.

"What's that?" I asked.

"You forgot that the yacht might sink, taking the original of that letter down with her!"

CHAPTER XI

DOUBLE CHECKMATE

I DIDN'T sleep very well after that. Before I went to bed I not only jammed the back of a chair beneath the locked door but I upended another chair and put it on the floor, its four legs pointing toward the door half-way between the door and my berth.

I'll have to ask you to believe that I am not easily frightened. But I like my skin the way it is, not sliced as were my sheet and mattress. And knowing that somebody had every intention of slicing it like that was none too comforting.

He tried again the very next night. But this time I was waiting for him. I

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had a hunch. My light was out and I had that knife close by. I knew I wouldn't be too handy with a knife, but it was all I had and I fully intended to do a job with it if I had to.

And the knife would do a job, all right. The blade itself was about eight inches long and it had a ridged handle which fitted comfortably into my hand.

As I say, I had a hunch. I got into bed but I couldn't sleep. I kept listening for things. After a while I got up and took a healthy slug of Scotch. Then, instead of going back to toss restlessly in my berth, I put a small straight chair close to the door—on the hinge side of the door—and sat down there to wait it out, to see if my hunch was a good one or just an evidence of my jumpiness.

It was a good one, all right. About two o'clock I heard the faintest possible grinding of a key in the lock. I took a good grip on the knife and waited.

And here's a surprising thing! I'm a fairly peaceable sort of citizen. I'd no more consider killing a man—ordinarily—than you would. Yet as I sat there, waiting for that door to open, I found myself wanting the man to come in—actually wanting him to come in so I could do to him what he had tried to do to me, to slam that knife down into him right to the hilt!

I got to my feet with infinite quiet as I heard the knob of that door turn. I was shaking all over as if with malarial chills. I edged a little closer to the door.

I decided to wait until he came in and started across the floor toward my berth. Then I'd call him, let him spin around and then I'd jump him.

I put my fingertips against the door so I could tell when it opened, for I assumed that the prowler, whoever it was, would have switched off the passageway lights, as he had done before.

I felt the door vibrate as the knob was turned, felt it move inward just the smallest fraction of an inch. And then I heard a creak from the chair I had jammed under the knob.

It creaked once, and again, and then the door vibrated again as the man outside let the knob snap back.

So my chair had stymied him! Believe me of not, I was disappointed. Now that I had gotten all keyed up, I actually wanted the mug to come in and to get what I had waiting for him.

Frantically I stepped ahead, ripped at the chair to get it away from the knob. But it stuck somewhere. I guess the legs jammed into the carpet. I almost tore it apart before I hauled it out from under the knob. I threw it away from me and yanked the door open.

THE corridor was dark. Almost dark, I mean. Faint refulgence from the lounge percolated back through the entire length. And my eyes were focused to darkness.

I went out into the passageway like a stone out of a sling shot. But the place was empty. The few split seconds while I had noisily wrestled with that chair had given the prowler his warning and his time to get away.

A door next but one to mine came open just a crack. I whirled, every muscle ready. But it was not the prowler. I got a partial picture of Grace Taver, peering anxiously through the crack of her door. She looked terrible. Her yellow hair was in curlers and her face was all covered with some kind of grease.

"In Heaven's name, what are you doing?" she whispered, staring at the knife in my hand.

I felt silly there in my pajamas waving a knife around.

"I'm walking in my sleep," I said in a snarling whisper.

I don't know whether she was frightened of me or whether she suddenly remembered how she looked. But she squeaked and closed her door. I heard the rasping of a bolt.

I was all alone there in the darkness and reaction set in. I had been geared up to kill a man nad now there was nothing for me to do but to go to bed.

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I went back into my room, jammed the chair under the knob again and had the satisfaction of knowing that it made an impassable barrier. Now and from now on, I could sleep without worrying about somebody creeping in on me.

But at that it was poor satisfaction. I had a bad let-down. I began to shake. It took five or six drinks to get me quieted so I could sleep.

And when I did sleep, my dreams were violent and confused. I can't remember anything about them now except that they were not restful.

The next day they changed my cabin. Right after lunch Mrs. Taver broke the news to me.

"Mr. Mason," she said, matter-of-factly, "I hope I won't inconvenience you, but we'll have to ask you to move into Cabin 9 right away. I'll have a steward change you. Captain Scanlon says there's a weeping seam just under your floor that he'd like to get at. Do you mind?"

This was on deck. I had seen Hoke talking earnestly to her just a few minutes ago, so I knew what it was all about. He had guessed that I had hidden that incriminating letter somewhere in my cabin, and he was determined to find it if he could.

I looked, now, at Hoke, who was standing at the weather shrouds, beyond earshot. But he knew what we were talking about, and the muscles at the corners of his lips were twitching in satisfaction at having checkmated me.

There were things I had to do quickly now, but it was necessary to keep Mrs. Taver unsuspecting. This was a private little game between Hoke and myself. So I was casual.

"Of course, Mrs. Taver," I said, calmly. "I'll go right down now and get ready for the change."

"The captain," she said, "wanted me to be sure not to inconvenience you. He'll send a steward to help—"

But that was all I heard. I needed just ten or fifteen seconds, but I needed those very badly. I smiled sweetly at Mrs. Taver, turned toward the companionway and walked slowly to the top step, where I was out of sight of the captain.

Then, take it from me, I hurried, for I had already seen him swing quickly to follow me.

I MADE it, all right. I ran the last few steps, thumbed the catch on my door and slammed it shut. In an instant I was on my knees in front of that bottom drawer and had pulled the thing completely out of the dresser.

My hand darted into the darkness, felt swiftly along the flooring in that dead space below the point where the bottom of the drawer would have been. I got the letter, jammed it into my pocket, and managed somehow to get the drawer into place. I raced for the washstand and got my shaving kit out.

I was just getting my razor fitted into its compartment when the door was unceremoniously opened and Hoke Scanlon stepped across the threshold with a steward hard at his heels. Oh, I knew the door was unlocked, all right, but I hoped that my start of surprise was authentic. Hastily I thrust my shaving kit back into the mirrored locker and closed the glass door.

"You—you startled me!" I breathed; and then, with studied effect, I let myself become angry. "Captain," I snapped, "I'll thank you to knock at the door of my cabin next time when you want to come in."

Hoke Scanlon looked definitely triumphant, but his voice was carefully regretful.

"Sorry, Mr. Mason," he said, respectfully. "I thought you knew I was right behind you. I have a cabin steward here who will help you change your gear to the other cabin."

"I don't need a steward," I said, petulantly. "I can do it myself."

"Mrs. Taver ordered me to see that you were put to no trouble on account of the move," he insisted.

"All right, all right," I said, nervously,

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and I dragged a suitcase out of the hanging locker and began to throw things into it.

Hoke Scanlon remained there while we worked. And I noticed that when I took my toilet articles out of the washstand locker he managed to be standing right at my shoulder.

That amused me.

I did my best to keep up my act without overdoing it. I fumbled with the packing and darted about and glanced quickly at Scanlon a couple of times. He was expressionless, except for the gleam far back in his eyes. He did not speak.

At last we were through. The white-jacketed steward had carried my suitcase and kit bag to the next stateroom. I followed him with as much reluctance as I could manage. And Hoke Scanlon, behind me, carefully locked the door. I stamped into my cabin and slammed the door right in his face.

Then I sat down, feeling extremely pleased with myself. It was apparent enough that Hoke was a good deal more worried about my letter than he had admitted. I had him running in circles—for a while anyhow.

And I had not been in my new room for half an hour when I heard men going to work on my old cabin. I waited a while, then walked past the open door. There were five seamen in there and the place was a shambles.

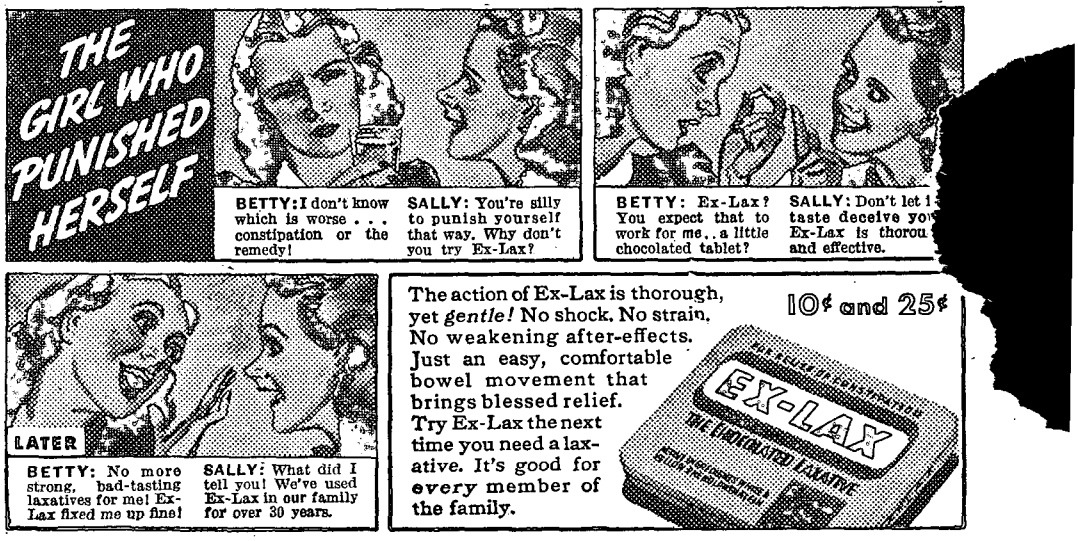
They had torn the washstand locker away from the bulkhead, had pulled up the rug and gone to work on the flooring below and were now at work on my built-in berth, dismantling it to get right down to the skin of the ship.

Hoke Scanlon was standing in the middle of the cabin, directing the work. I paused in the doorway.

"If the weeping seam really leaks, Captain," I said, very politely, "why not just pull up the decking there and get at it? Or could you be looking for something in the mattress? If so, I didn't bring them aboard. They came with you, in the ship."

And at the blackness of his scowl as he turned to answer, I felt very much better. The letter was safe again, in the dark little air pocket below the bottom drawer in my new cabin, which was just like the old. So I went back to my room in a fairly contented mood and rearranged my gear to my liking.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK


THE GIRL WHO PUNISHED HERSELF
BETTY: I don't know which is worse . . . constipation or the remedy!
SALLY: You're silly to punish yourself that way. Why don't you try Ex-Lax?
BETTY: Ex-Lax? You expect that to work for me . . a little chocolated tablet?
SALLY: Don't let t taste deceive yo Ex-Lax is thorou and effective.
LATER
BETTY: No more strong, bad-tasting laxatives for me! Ex-Lax fixed me up fine!
SALLY: What did I tell you! We've used Ex-Lax in our family for over 30 years.
The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet gentle! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.
10¢ and 25¢
RELIEVES CONSTIPATION
EX-LAX
THE CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

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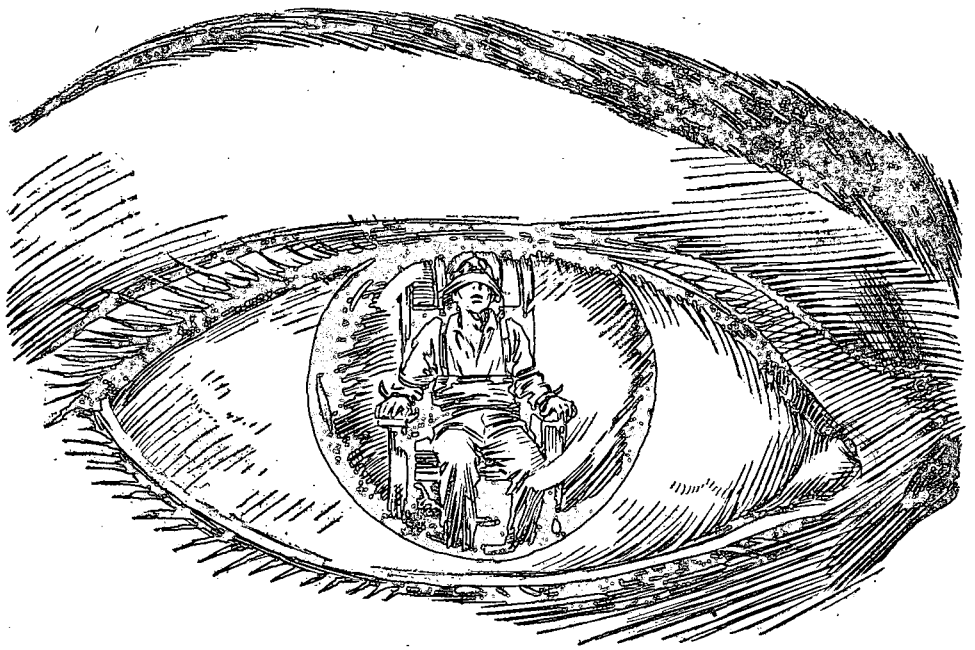

Second Sight

By EUSTACE COCKRELL

Author of "Sweet Talkin' Man," "Once A Hero," etc.

Two persons came together in that house, both of them beaten in advance. They had nothing in common but a game of checkers. And by playing it straight down the line, each one boosted the other into the king row

THE little boy came down the stairs walking pretty confidently and the man sat there on the divan—sat quite still—and watched him.

The little boy had a hand on the banister and the hand wasn't clean; yet it wasn't dirty as kids his age get their hands playing marbles and games like that.

His hand had a sort of permanent, indoors-looking sort of dirtiness to it; and his clothes—they looked that way, too.

The man observed all these things because he was very observant. It was a part of the man's business to be observant and he noticed these things from habit.

The boy walked across the room a little way and then he turned at right angle and took two slower steps and then he started walking faster. The second quick step he took brought him into the chair and it cracked against his shin and as he fell, the man could hear his arm hitting the chair as he and the chair both toppled over. It made quite a clatter.

The boy got up slowly and the man could hear him under his breath, not crying but holding back the tears and sounding as if he'd like to cry: "I wonder who moved the chair? I wonder who moved the chair?"

The boy was lost now and he stood

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there trying to figure where he was, apparently, and listening, too. He didn't have to listen long.

A woman's voice came down the stairs from some place above and it was querulous: "You quit knockin' over that furniture, Sammy Reed, and fetch me up that broom."

"Some one moved the chair," the boy said. "I'm hurryin', though." He made his way carefully around the chair, straightened it up and then moved more cautiously out a nearby door. Presently he returned, bearing a broom, and started up the steps.

"Bub," the man said, and his voice was low and flat but it had a gravelly sound to it, "tell your maw I want a room if she can come down."

The boy stopped at the sound of the man's voice. He waited a long moment before he answered. "I never knew anyone was here," he said. The man didn't say anything and the boy walked up three more steps and turned and in a lower voice added: "She ain't my maw."

THE woman who came down the steps a minute later was large, blowsy, and mostly blond. She took in the expensive kit bag, the cut of the man's dark suit, with a hard glance from the bottom of the steps and hastened her approach slightly.

Down in the dingy foyer she asked: "You want a room?"

"I'd like to look," the man said.

"They're a dollar a night or four-fifty by the week. Do you aim to stay long?"

"A while," the man said.

"That's in advance," the woman said and started up the stairs. She wheezed a little at the top, turned and unlocked a door. "This is a nice one," she said, and waved a vague hand around the dingy room with its poisonous bright spread thrown over the bed. "Right next to the bath."

The man walked to the window and looked out. Then he turned and when he turned he had nine dollar bills in his hand. Crisp new dollar bills. "I'll take it," he said. "Here's for two weeks."

The woman took the money, busied herself inconsequentially with a lamp and asked: "You go to business, Mr. . . . Mr. . . . ?"

"My name's Bland," the man said. "I don't go to business. I've been sick, and I want to rest."

"This is a nice quiet room, Mr. Bland," the woman said. "Since they've tore down the El, it's nice and quiet."

The man walked back and looked out of the window. "Who's the blinky kid?"

"Oh," the woman said; and her voice changed, went higher with a false note, "That's poor little Sammy Reed. He's an orphan. His paw died here and I just kept him on. He's always been that way."

The man said, "All right," in a final way and after a moment the woman left.

For three minutes after she had gone, the man stood looking out the window, then he walked softly to the door and stood there a few seconds listening. He opened the door, looked out, closed it, locked it, and then opened the kit bag.

Some of the clothes he hung in the closet. But he left enough clothes in the bag to swaddle the two automatics beyond detection. Then he unlocked the door and picking up a razor and the towel hanging from its rack, went out into the hall and disappeared into the bathroom.

MR. BLAND didn't go out of his room except briefly and at night. When he returned from these trips, he carried parcels from the delicatessen under his arm and his pockets bulged with cigarettes.

The fourth night that he went out, he was gone only five minutes, hardly long enough in fact to have gotten out the door. He came back up the dingy hall silently, opened the door and stood there not saying anything.

The woman straightened up where she had been fumbling with the lock of the kit bag, flushed, then stammered, "I was just straightenin' up your room, Mr. Bland. You—you go out so little I don't have much chance."

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The man looked at her a moment, and when he spoke his voice was even and soft. "I can get you a nice solid rap for workin' that blinky kid," he said. "There are laws in this state about that."

The woman bristled for a moment, drawing herself up. "I told you," she said icily, "I was just straightenin' up your room."

The man smiled a thin smile, not saying anything. "At eleven-thirty?" He stopped, and his grin became a little crooked. "In a negligée?"

"I'm not hurtin' that boy," the woman said. "Boys oughta work, even if they are blind. It's good for their character," she added, regaining some of her defiance.

"You're a one-time loser," the man said. "I knew that when I moved in. It would be a good solid rap."

The woman's rouged cheeks looked almost purple as the blood went from her face and the man stood aside holding the door open for her. "We understand each other," he said.

The next morning Mr. Bland opened his door as he heard the boy coming up the stairs. He knew it was Sammy because Sammy wasn't quite tall enough or strong enough to keep the big bucket that he carried up every morning to mop the third floor bathroom from bumping on the steps.

When he heard Sammy on the landing, Mr. Bland opened the door and looked down at him.

"Bub," Mr. Bland said. "When you get through up there, come in my room." And Mr. Bland closed his door, listening to Sammy, who hadn't answered, bump the bucket up the second flight of steps.

When the boy opened the door, the man walked over, stood over him, drawing back his fist. He swung. The boy didn't move and the man caught his hand halfway to the boy's face, nodded to himself, and sat down on the bed. "Sit down, Bub," he said, "I ain't moved a thing."

The boy walked across the room and sat down on the one chair.

"What's eight times eight?" the man asked.

"Sixty-four," the boy said, and he smiled a little, and his teeth were white against his slightly grimy skin.

"How long's your pop been dead?"

"He died here," the boy said slowly, "December twenty-fourth, nineteen thirty-seven."

MR. BLAND didn't say anything for a minute. Finally he asked: "If you took thirty-two black blocks and thirty-two white blocks and laid 'em out in a square—one black, one white—would you know what that looked like?"

"I know," the boy said, "how it would *be.*"

The man coughed. "If you laid the blocks out like you'd have a checker board. You know what checkers are?"

"It's a game," the boy said.

"It's a game," the man said, "that you can play just as good without seein' as with seein' if you got plenty of savvy. I thought maybe me and you could play some checkers. I bought a board."

"Let me feel the board," the boy said; and his face lit up. "Let me feel it."

Mr. Bland handed him the board. The boy took it and held his finger at one corner. "What color is that?" he asked.

"That's black," Mr. Bland said, then went on. "I was in a place once, and there was another guy in the room next to me and we couldn't see each other but we could hear each other. The guy had plenty of savvy; like me he was smart.

"We played those checkers, and we never even had a board nor nothing. We just did it in our head. Just imagined we were movin' on a board. So you see," he finished, "you can play that game just as good seein' as not seein'."

"Who won?" the boy asked.

Mr. Bland laughed a hard humorless laugh.

"He takes me for two million, four hundred thousand," he said. "But I never paid him. He was goin' where the dough wouldn't do him any good." Mr. Bland remembered Death Row, and a little shadow crossed his face.

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"I'd like to play," the boy said shyly, "if you can teach me." The eagerness in his voice came through and made it sound very young.

"What about your work?"

"Mrs. Fisher," the boy said—"that's the landlady—she went down town with Mr. Welch. She won't be home 'til late."

Mr. Bland set up the board on a table between them and placed the checkers. "What did your old man do for a livin'?" he asked conversationally.

The boy didn't say anything for a long time. Finally he answered and his voice was sober. "He used to teach school," he said. "But my mother died when I was born and he quit. He died of alcoholism. Do you know what that is, Mr. Bland?"

"It's a disease," the man said slowly, "that comes from knowin' what to do and not bein' able to do it." He paused. "Now what you are tryin' to do in this game," he went on quickly, "is get your men down to the last line. . . ."

THE next morning Mr. Bland sought out the landlady. Mrs. Fisher was all blond once more this morning but otherwise she looked bad. Mrs. Fisher didn't feel well. Not well at all.

Mr. Bland found Mrs. Fisher in the foyer making halfhearted attempts to dust. Sammy Reed stood back against one wall and there were four angry red streaks across his left cheek. Mr. Bland saw all these things but he didn't say anything for a minute.

Finally he beckoned to Mrs. Fisher and she came over to him. "I ain't strong enough to look for a job yet," Mr. Bland whispered. "And I get bored lyin' up there in that room. If I pay you a dollar a day you can hire you a maid to help you, and let Sammy stay up with me. I'm teachin' him to play checkers."

"Humph," the woman snorted. "And so . . ."

The man's eyes narrowed and his voice got a little more gravelly. "That place," he said, "ain't a country club."

"Yes," she sneered. "I don't know who you are, but I'll bet you're hot as a Chinese firecracker yourself. You ain't foolin'. . ."

The man walked over and picked up the 'phone at the foot of the stairs.

"Who you callin'?" the woman asked, and her voice was a hoarse whisper.

"The cops," the man said.

"A dollar a day will be fine, Mr. Bland. That will be fine. I was only jokin'. Sammy, you run along and play checkers with the man. It'll be all right."

IT SEEMED to Mr. Bland that it was a surprisingly short time after that, that Sammy Reed played him to a draw.

And on the afternoon that Sammy Reed played Mr. Bland to a draw, his face tense with concentration as he called his final move, Mr. Bland sat back and laughed for the first time in many months. Mr. Bland was pleased and proud.

"Sammy," he said. "That's all right. I was playin' my best and I didn't beat you. In a few more days you are gonna start takin' me and that is gonna be too bad."

"I'll never beat you, Mr. Bland," the boy said, and turned his face up and smiled. "I'll never beat you, you're too good."

The man looked down at him and frowned. "Bub," he said, "what do you mean by that crack?"

"I don't want to beat you, Mr. Bland. I wouldn't want to beat you if I could. You have to stay up here in this little old room all by yourself all the time and can't go out like other people do. And you've been so good to me."

The man didn't say anything but his eyes narrowed.

"When I was little," the boy went on hurriedly. "My Dad used to give me stuff on Christmas. He even had brought me home some candy the night he died. They found it in the room. And when I'm with you, it seems like that. Like Christmas."

"Christmas," the man snarled. "Christmas. Your old man conked out on you

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the night before Christmas, didn't he, and he left you all alone with this—this—Mrs. Fisher, didn't he?"

Sammy Reed shrank back into his chair and he looked up at Rocky Hannagan with his sightless eyes. There were tears in his eyes. "I'm sorry, Mr. Bland," he said. "I didn't want to make you mad."

The man went on. "So you think I'm sewed up here, wedged here like a rat in a trap, do you, my little blinky friend? I don't owe you a thing, hear? You don't have to stay here takin' a beatin' every day. You could go out with a cup and run fifteen fish a day. I don't owe you nothin', see. You get the hell out of here."

When the boy had gone, Rocky Hannagan, alias Mr. Bland, started walking up and down the floor. He was talking to himself.

"So I'm wedged. Too hot to move. The great Rocky, the only guy in twenty years to spring his way out of the Death House. Christmas! Judas on a high-wheeled bicycle, I'm Santy Claus now. I teach him to play checkers and he makes me Santy Claus. I don't owe him a thing. I don't owe him nothing. He could take that face of his and a tin cup and run fiteen slugs a day and never work nothing but the theatre district. . . ."

That night Rocky Hannagan didn't leave his room, nor the next day. The next night a timid knock came on his door, and then a voice.

"I never meant to make you mad, Mr. Bland," Sammy Reed said softly through the keyhole. "I think Christmas is the nicest day there is and I was kind of tryin' to tell you—you—"

There was a little sob and Rocky heard Sammy Reed's footsteps as he crept upstairs to bed.

THREE days later Rocky Hannagan came out of his room, walked to the bathroom, shaved the thick stubble from his face and bathed and dressed. Then for the first time in many weeks he walked out into the street in the daylight. In his hand he carried three thick letters.

When he came back he was smiling and he called Sammy Reed and they went into his room, and four times that afternoon, Mr. Bland beat Sammy Reed playing checkers and all the games were close.

•

Father, this is Bobby Hannagan writing to you, and I'm coming in, Father. I escaped five days before my execution date and I've lived like a rat in a cage. But when they burn me, Father, it's got to be in December, else I won't come in, because that way I can give a Christmas gift to a boy and he mustn't ever know . . .

•

Sammy Reed came in every day, and every day he played checkers with Mr. Bland and each day he improved.

"Mr. Bland," he asked finally when he had his courage screwed back up, "what made you mad about me saying—me saying—well, you know. . . ."

Mr. Bland smiled. "Kid," he said, "I been doin' a little reading up about that Christmas. I didn't know much about it. I guess it just hit me wrong. I been reading up a good deal about that Christmas. Did you know the Germans and the English came out of their trenches and gave each other presents on Christmas nineteen-fifteen?"

He paused. "When you get so you can see, why you catch a midnight Mass some Christmas eve and burn a candle for Mr. Bland."

"See?" the boy said. "But . . ."

"Sure, you'll see. Santy Claus will take care of that. You watch."

"Oh, no! Don't tell me that! Don't . . ."

"We'll make believe, then. You catch this Mass and burn a candle for Bobby Hannagan. I give you the wrong name. I better give you Hannagan, it's safer."

"Oh," Sammy Reed said and he smiled. "It's a game. A game, like checkers. We make believe?"

Rocky Hannagan started to say something and his voice came out husky and

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he stopped. "It's your move, dope," he said.

•

Doc, this is Rocky Hannagan writting to you. I got a proposition. I'm writing the priest I used to know when I was a kid, and he's a square shooter and you got to be too.

There's a little operation, Doc. I've read up and you've done some of them, a few, and now you got to do another and you'll get paid, I'll fix that, you got to make it work, too, Doc.

It's got to come out so it comes out as close to Christmas as you can make it. See I'm coming in. I'm writing kind of in circles, Doc, but you'll see what I mean.

It's that cornea—maybe I spell it wrong but you'll know what I mean before I finish. I want the bandages to come off around Christmas time, see. I won a couple grand on a skate out at Jamaica and the dough ain't hot that you get paid with.

Now Doc, I'm telling you that if you miss I'll . . .

•

"Now," Mr. Bland said, "You got me cornered. Two kings to my one. Now think hard and get me down in that corner like I've told you. You're a kick in the pants, kid."

"I don't want to beat you, Mr. Bland."

"You work me on down there. You call me the wrong move and I'll tan your bottom." And Mr. Bland laughed.

•

I guess that I should call you Your Excellency, Governor, is that right? This is Rocky Hannagan writing to you and Governor, I'm coming in if you'll play ball.

I wrote Father Flannagan and Dr. Matson and they have given me a sign. They didn't answer but they ran an ad in the Times and so I know it's all right with them.

But the kid mustn't know. I'm sort of mixed up, Governor, but you'll see before I finish. If electricity hurts the cornea (maybe I spell it wrong) you'll have to pass a bill or something so they can hang me or shoot me or I won't come in.

You'll never take me and you may lose some coppers trying and this way I can give a Christmas present. I'm mixed up, Governor, but as I write, you'll understand . . .

•

"Thataboy," Mr. Bland said. "Now you got my king where I can't move. See, I'm beat. Sammy, you're in the king row, kid. You're in the king row. You've beat me."

"I didn't *want* to beat you, Mr. Bland," Sammy Reed said, and there were tears in his voice.

"Listen, palooka," Mr. Bland said, and his voice was husky, not hard and gravelly. "Win, kid, always. If you can win on the square, why always win if it don't hurt no one. And kid, winning from me don't hurt anyone. It gives me a boot to have you win."

The boy didn't say anything.

"You see," Mr. Bland said slowly, "life is kind of like checkers. You may get jumped and took off, you may never get to the king row, but don't never try to go anyway but straight down the line. If you get jumped, why you got other men, try to get them in the king row."

•

. . . This is Rocky, Warden. I was always a good prisoner and you got some swing yourself about how stuff runs up there. You get me a break on this proposition. I've wrote Father Flannagan and the Governor and the Doc and they'll play ball.

I'm giving you my address. It's right on the outside of the letter and I know you're a square shooter and you can tell the boys down at headquarters when you get ready. Tell 'em to come at night after the kid's gone to bed and I don't want him to be here the next morning. I figure the old bag that runs this dump isn't the best influence. Now Warden, I'm trusting you. I've give you all the dope . . .

•

Mr. Bland was packing. "Yeah," he said. "I'm leavin', tonight, I guess. Some

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friends of mine are comin'." Rocky Hannagan was glad for a minute that Sammy Reed was blind. Finally he went on.

"I did some more readin' up on that Christmas. You know they swung up a coupla guys with Him when they give Him the business. One of 'em, accordin' to some, was a pretty right Joe. You know, when the goin' got tough and it was all over he turned out to be a pretty right guy."

Sammy Reed gulped.

"Now if you start bawlin', I'll tan your hide. You get on to bed. And Sammy. Sammy, remember about that king row, right down the line, kid. Right down the line. They can't beat you if you stay down the line. You're bound to wind up in the king row."

THE doctor held up the figures. "Can you see that?" he asked.

"Yes," Sammy Reed said. "But I don't know what it is."

"It's a *two*." Dr. Matson held up another figure.

"I don't know what that is either," Sammy Reed said.

"It's a five," the doctor said. "And that word, it's December. In other words, it's Christmas morning. Merry Christmas."

Sammy Reed looked troubled. "Doctor Matson," he said finally, "I can't get out, can I?"

"What do you want out for, son?"

"I guess," Sammy Reed said, "it'll be all right for you to do it for me. I want you to burn a candle for me in a Catholic church for a Mr. Hannagan. And I want you to go to a Protestant church and say a prayer for Mr. Bland.

"Mr. Bland was awfully funny about that. He said he always liked to play the field, though I don't know what he meant, and I want to do that for him because he's the nicest man excepting my father I ever knew. He taught me to play checkers when I was blind."

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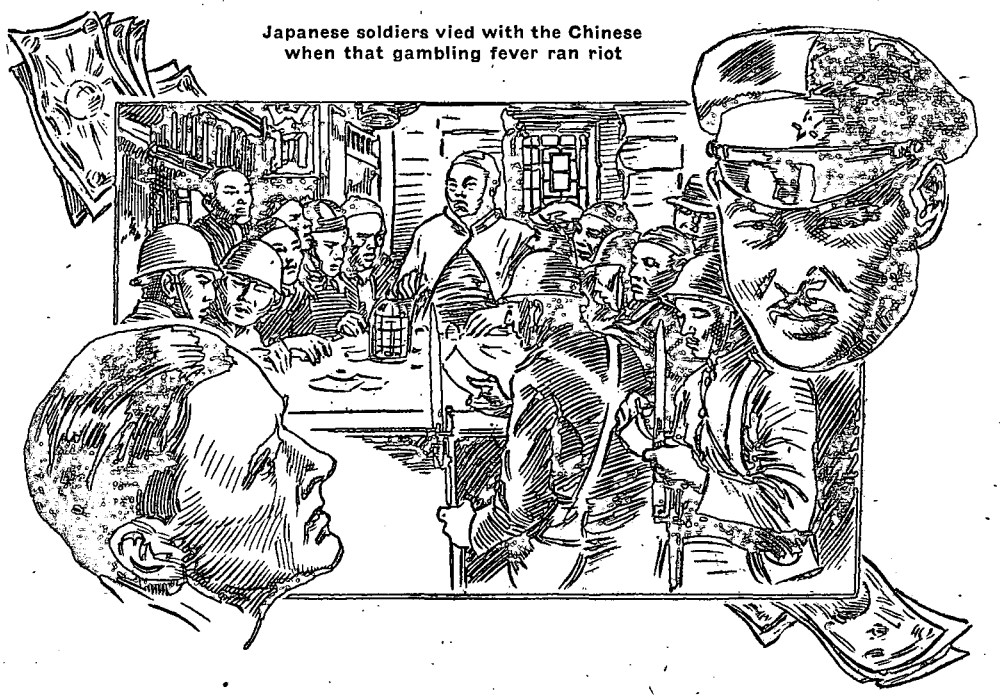

Japanese soldiers vied with the Chinese when that gambling fever ran riot

When No Dogs Bark

It must be written somewhere: When a white smart-money man locks horns with an Oriental trickster, the white man gets taken. Only this time the inscription reads slightly backward

By ALFRED BATSON
Author of "Glory Hill," "Wolf, Wolf!" etc.

COLONEL TOMASHI INO, military governor of the newly created province of Shanfu in Manchukuo, glanced up from his worried meditation as he saw the foreigner come along the flagstoned path in the garden of his *yamen,* or official headquarters.

A Japanese soldier whose duty it was to usher callers into his superior's presence had been left in the wake of the white man's rapid strides, but struggled to catch up and maintain that dignity and face so close to the Oriental heart.

Suddenly the foreigner came abreast of a mangy *wonk* that had strayed into the enclosure. The dog gave no sign of his presence. But when the soldier neared it there was a low, vicious growl and a baring of stained teeth.

Ino smiled as he saw the tableau from his impressive six-foot height, the cur creeping forward menacingly and the soldier leaping aside in terror.

"Like your late masters, you would bite the hand that feeds you, eh?" his mind ran. "But your new masters will teach you at the point of a bayonet that Asia is for Asiatics, and China is for Japan. For whites there will be no place—above ground."

As the newcomer paused and waited for the soldier, the mask of inscrutability that had been Ino's doughy face was abruptly

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wreathed in a fawning smile, disarming and genial.

"My friend," he beamed, "you have seen enough of China. For your own good you should leave."

"I beg pardon, excellency," the foreigner said, surprised. "I should leave—?"

"There is a saying in this country," Ino interposed, "that when no dogs bark at an outlander it is because he has been so long here he has come to smell like a Chinese. Therefore the wise foreigner gets out. But not you," he put in quickly. "Not yet."

The visitor's warm chuckle equaled that of his host.

There was a moment of polite chit-chat before he followed Ino into the ornately furnished office that was the nerve center of the Nipponese army in the vast territory sweeping from the Yangtze to the Soviet border. Then Ino moved behind his desk, waved his guest to a seat opposite, and grinned toothily.

"I do not yet know your name because of my stupid guard's fear. But I presume you are—?"

"The man you sent for," the foreigner put in, "Vickers. Val Vickers."

Meanwhile Ino's piggish eyes had swept him in a close scrutiny: the medium-height frame, the cool, even blue eyes, and the long, tapering fingers that gave slight evidence of ever having engaged in manual toil. The picture branded him a dilettante, but his record was quite otherwise.

"AH, YES, Val Vickers. I have heard of your feats as a renowned gun runner, a little opium, perhaps, some antiques smuggled out of the country. Is it not so?"

"I manage to turn a penny now and then," Vickers admitted.

"Exactly, and successfully, from all accounts. It is because I am confronted with a situation that only a genius of your calibre can solve that I have sent for you."

Vickers sat back and matched the enigmatic smile which came to him over the desk top. Then he yawned brazenly lest Ino should think he had been taken in by the polite praise. He knew Japanese and he didn't trust them, whether military governors or the lowest of coolie house boys. But he'd bide his time and wait.

"My problem is this," the colonel plunged ahead. "It is the program of my country to make this newly captured territory fully Japanese as quickly as possible. To that end we have reorganized the banking structure and in place of the old Chinese currency we are issuing paper money backed by our newly formed Bank of Manchukuo. You know of these notes?"

"Indeed I do," Vickers mused to himself behind a nod. "They're so lousy they're down to nineteen cents U. S. on the Shanghai market, and going begging at that. The Chinese won't have anything to do with them, nor will your own men. They demand to be paid off in good old Yokohama Bank issues."

But aloud he said, "I have heard some rumors. Yet since my transactions are only in American funds I fear I'm a bit hazy."

"To be expected," Ino admitted, grinning. "The fact is that the Chinese can understand only Chinese money. It is to solve this riddle that you are here. The terms will be greatly to your satisfaction."

"I beg pardon," Vickers interrupted. "To solve what riddle?"

"Of getting our money in circulation. You know the Chinese mind through long residence. Perhaps you can think of a way to overcome what they like to imagine is their patriotism, but what is more truly their shortsightedness. We Japenese are in China to stay."

Vickers looked out the window a long moment. Then he studied his shoes, the floor and the full length picture of the Mikado behind Ino's desk.

"It would seem to me," he said finally, "that since you obtain foodstuffs from the natives, hire gangs for roadbuilding and engage in innumerable other transactions, it could be done by paying only in the notes you wish to introduce."

He spoke with tongue in cheek; for he'd seen many instances of how the Japanese

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paid for what they got. The payment was more truly a lead slug or a broadswordsman's lesson.

"There is our difficulty," Ino grimaced. "The Chinese are too stupid to desire much traffic with us. It would take a century to get an appreciable amount of money in circulation by the method you suggest. There must be some other way. Think hard. You are a man of many resources when it comes to money. The terms—"

"Ah," Vickers cut him off. "Much as I dislike to discuss money matters, still—"

"I understand," Ino blurted. His fat lips pursed and his piggish eyes narrowed. "If you got a half million dollars in circulation our terms would be one percent."

VICKERS rose, bowed, picked up his helmet. He had almost reached the door when Ino had him by the arm.

"Sit down! Sit down! Let us talk. Business is business. I'll make it two percent."

Vickers' rebuttal came without a pause. "I'm afraid we are not talking on a common ground. If I should interest myself in a deal over ten thousand dollars and the story got out it would be a blow to my prestige from which I'd never recover." Again he placed his hand on the knob.

But he knew the Oriental mind well enough to appreciate that the more he bargained the higher he rose in Ino's estimation. It went without saying that he was broke—he was always broke—yet in the manner of living to which he had accustomed himself ten thousand dollars was still being broke. Reluctantly he let Ino lead him back to the chair.

The outcome after a quarter hour was that the two percent had been raised to ten. And at that he was obviously hesitant to accept, though he knew that fifty thousand U. S. dollars was money in any man's language.

"I should insist," he said after a thoughtful moment, "that my commission be deposited in an American bank in Shanghai weekly."

Ino's gloom dispersed on the instant. "You have hit on a scheme? What is it?"

"The All-America bank in Shanghai—weekly," Val reiterated. "Is that clear?"

"Perfectly. But the scheme?"

"And in American dollars?"

"No trouble." Ino crowded closer. "Tell me—"

"I shall want an order from you giving me complete authority to work my scheme."

"I am in full command," Ino put in somewhat stiffly. "We are wasting time. What is your plan?"

Val's voice dropped to a whisper as he told it. At the conclusion, Ino's snapping black eyes spoke his approval.

"I knew you were the man to solve it," he exulted. "I knew you understood these Chinese dogs. You have the perfect scheme because you know their true natures."

But inwardly he was deciding that the American's plan was so simple that to pay ten percent for it was subjecting himself to a gross case of thievery.

"Why," his brain whispered, "I was on the verge of thinking of that same plan myself."

THAT night Val Vickers entrained for the South. Four days later he stepped from the Nanking-Shanghai express at the International Settlement's North Station and lost no time in reaching the imposing edifice occupied by the All-America Bank on the lower Bund.

"Certain monies will be arriving each week for deposit in my name," he said to the manager. "They will come from the Jap headquarters in Chapei. Immediately on deposit I wish a telegram sent me care of Colonel Ino at Chinghong, Shanfu.

"But the better to divert any possible suspicion which might arise in strangers' minds, I wish the amount to be referred to as cases of sesamum seeds. Thus if seven thousand dollars is deposited, the wire should read that seven thousand cases of sesamum seed have been disposed of abroad."

"It's slightly irregular," the manager said behind a smile, "but in these days nothing surprises me." He paused, his face suddenly grave. "I'm wondering—"

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Val Vickers anticipated him with a broad grin. "You're perhaps wondering why our friends couldn't forge succeeding telegrams, once they see the first one, eh?"

The manager nodded.

Vickers leaned over and unlaced a shoe. Putting it on the manager's desk, he pointed to an ink-written number inside. "The style number," he said. "Please make a note of it."

The manager reached for a pencil and paper as his client called off the numerals—"Four, six, one, seven, five, two, eight, nought, five, four."

"I'll let nothing happen to this shoe," Vickers continued, "and you let nothing happen to your paper. Now after you've mentioned the sesamum seed in your telegrams, add a line to the effect that four thousand more cases are wanted. That's for the first. The second should read six thousand wanted. Catch on?"

The banker caught on. "Very ingenious," he said.

Val shook hands and departed.

His next stop was at the office of the Ta Fung-Fat Importing Company whose manager, Mr. Ta Fung-Fat, was the behind-the-scenes leader of Shanghai's underworld. A brief conversation ensued after which the estimable Ta's Buddhalike face creased through its mounds of fat into a broad yellow smile.

He then summoned nineteen trusted aides; bags were packed with paraphernalia necessary to Val's scheme, and the whole party caught the first train north.

But as they rumbled through the dank China night, in far Chinghong Colonel Tomashi Ino was turning over and over in his mind that Val Vickers was nothing but a thief, and that the ancient code of his forebears had taught him to despise thieves. There must be some way to take Vickers down.

It wasn't until a fitful light was breaking in the East that the doughty leader of troops sat bolt upright in his bed. By the sacred Satsuma, he had it! Curses and disease on all pigs of foreigners, but he had it!

It was as simple as the plan which had occurred to the thief who called himself a "broker," and it could be worked without exciting the slightest suspicion.

"By the bones of my honorable ancestors," he whispered into the gloom, "I have indeed the brain of a mighty strategist. Not much longer will I be a mere colonel. I will be a general. Nothing will stop my honorable rise, for I'll make enough out of this deal to pay a politician for arranging my promotion."

WHEN Val Vickers and his entourage emerged from the train at Chinghong they were rushed by automobile to the *yamen*. Val took Ta with him behind the closed doors of the private office. Introductions were quickly over and Ino reached into a drawer of his desk.

"Here," he said, holding out an envelope to Val, "is an order that you shall not be molested." Then, dipping into another drawer, he produced a huge sheet of bright, newly printed paper money of the Bank of Manchukuo.

"Here is enough to start," he continued eagerly. "When it is all exchanged come back for more."

Val Vickers wrapped both hands around the money before stowing it in a brief case.

"Fine," he said. "I'll get results or I don't know the Chinese."

Ta was preceding him to the door, when Ino beckoned him back. "Do you trust your associates?" he sought.

"Implicitly," Val responded as he watched Ta's retreating, bulging figure. "They've worked with me before. They can tell a counterfeit Chinese dollar by the wrinkles on Sun Yat Sen's face."

Ino was satisfied. Bowing Val out he returned to his desk and lighted a cigar. Then he went to a cupboard in the wall and poured himself a stiff drink of sake. Things were looking up, very much up. He'd be a general almost before he knew it—if the way this foreigner leaped at the bait was any indication.

But as the party of newcomers went down the flagstoned path, Ta Fung-Fat placed a hand on Val's arm.

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"Me no trust that pig," he growled. "Him give you money too quick."

"You're right he did," Val laughed. "But if he pulls anything I've got a stopper on him that won't let me be bitten twice."

. . . . Two days followed before Val, Ta, and one of the Chinese aides were ready to put the scheme into operation. They were in the city of Anwei, not far from the Manchukuoan-Soviet border, and as it was market day a crude stand was set up near the farmers' stalls.

Then from one of his rattan suitcases, Ta produced a copper birdcage containing three dice. Meanwhile his aide had laid out a painted board showing numbers from one to six. A curious crowd gathered and Ta went into a spiel that has been heard up and down China since the days of Confucius.

He announced that bystanders could bet any amount of money that pleased their fancy. Then the birdcage would be swung and the dice numbers showing when it came to rest would pay off. There was but one proviso, he went on in an undertone—his patriotism was such that only Chinese money would be accepted.

Gingerly a young boy come forward with a copper. Then an old woman with a twenty-cent piece. Gradually others followed. The cage was swung and the winners paid—in notes of the Bank of Manchukuo.

Val Vickers stood back and watched. Within an hour he knew that his plan was right. Gambling was in the natives' blood more strongly, even, that patriotism.

Meanwhile in a dozen other cities similar scenes were taking place as Ta's aides opened their suitcases and got to work. In some it was birdcage, in others the ancient three-shell game and a pea. A Chinese version of faro found ready customers; chuck-a-luck and fan-tan, can-can and *pei-do* were welcomed joyously.

At the end of the first night's play, Ta's drawer had taken in four hundred and ninety-six Chinese dollars. By the end of the first week it was up to six thousand three hundred and eighty-eight. When Val made the rounds of his other plants to collect he found that in five of them the gambling fever was so high that they'd run out of Japanese notes.

And he knew then as he entrained for Chinghong to settle with Ino that he'd work off the half million long before the termination of the ten weeks.

INO was all smiles when Val handed over the Chinese silver and bills. His smile widened as he wrote out a wire to the Shanghai headquarters that five thousand dollars was to be deposited to the account of Mr. Val Vickers in the All-America Bank.

But Val wasn't smiling—not outwardly. His fingers were crossed on Ino, until late that afternoon when he was handed a message. It read:

FIVE THOUSAND CASES SESAMUM SEED DISPOSED OF ABROAD. FOUR THOUSAND MORE CASES WANTED.

"What's the 'more cases wanted' part?" Ino asked.

"It's to make me look like a trader's agent."

"Ah, yes. Very ingenious. I knew you were a genius."

The upshot was that Val departed again on the night train with seventy-five thousand new Manchukuoan dollars. That was gone in five days, and Ta's aides were calling for more. The gambling fever of the countryfolk was insatiable.

But again Val held his breath in Ino's office as he waited for the reply from the bank manager. The "wanted" cases this time, according to the style number in his shoe, should be six.

Six thousand more cases wanted, read the telegram.

"I'm very pleased with results," Ino congratulated him. "You're making quick and easy commissions. Take a hundred thousand this time. I'll trust you as I have before, on your word of honor."

The net result was that in six weeks Val Vickers was shaking the pudgy hand of Colonel Tomashi Ino in the latter's private office.

"I would write you a letter of recommen-

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dation," the Jap was beaming, "but some people might not understand this deal. However, if you would like to work off a half million more I'll gladly turn it over to you."

An intuitive sixth sense made Val Vickers refuse with polite protestations. "I have a deal brewing in Shanghai," he said, as his brain thundered to explain the ominous menace which hung behind Ino's ingratiating smile.

As the towering Japanese stood before him, beaming, his piggish eyes pools of enigmatic joy, his hamlike hands clasping and unclasping like those of a child peering in a candy-filled window, Val Vickers was thinking that here was the easiest fifty thousand dollars he'd ever made.

It was a deal that would come once in a lifetime—but Ino had offered it twice.

The ex-gambling man, ex-gun runner, ex-anything that would turn an adventurous dollar, knew as he started for the door that he'd be back. But first would come that intuitively-inspired trip to Shanghai. This thing was too good to be true—yet he had destroyed those confirming telegrams one by one as they arrived, and the code-lined shoe had never been out of his sight. It *was* true.

Ino shook his head as he saw him go. Then he sat down at his desk, buried his head in his arms and laughed until the tears ran down his starched sleeve. That brusque foreigner of the steady, calm eyes and manicured hands, the man whose spring-trap brain had made his name known from Singapore to Honolulu, was the biggest fool he'd ever met.

And he knew he'd never see him again—after he got to Shanghai.

VAL VICKERS was in high fettle as he paid off Ta and his crowd at the Shanghai North Station. His spirits rose as he hastened along the Bund toward the All-America. They reached a crescendo that made him want to shout aloud when the bank manager met him with outstretched hand.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Vickers. I hope everything was satisfactory."

"Perfect," Val responded. "Perfect. Now you have—"

The manager anticipated him and produced a passbook.

Val opened it and glanced at the several entries. They totaled slightly over fifty thousand dollars. Then he glanced closer.

Suddenly his heart seemed to stop beating. Blood rushed into his head and he found it difficult to retain a poker face. Yet he pocketed the book nonchalantly, thanked the banker and went around the corner to the Palace where he ordered a double rye with a double cognac for a chaser.

An exchange board over the bar told him that Manchukuoan dollars were down to 16 cents U. S.

He didn't need a pencil to figure that instead of having fifty thousand U. S. dollars in the account, he had, rather, fifty thousand Manchukuoan, or a total of eight thousand U. S.

The whole thing was clear when he recalled that enigmatic smile of Ino's which had puzzled him. The wily Japanese had promised to pay off in American funds, but had paid off in his almost worthless paper instead.

And going farther back, Val knew that he'd told the All-American *taipan* that dollars would arrive for his account, without stipulating what kind. Thus the bank manager was obsolved. Val saw clearly how the thing had happened, and he knew the onus for it was on his own head.

Ino had tricked him. And Ino, at this moment, was probably telling the story to all within hearing.

Or was he? Ino being the crook that he was, Val Vickers thought it not without the realm of possibility that Ino had lined his own pockets in the deal, wherefore he would keep strictly silent.

It was that thought that made the lone foreigner in the dim corner of the Palace bar repeat his order. Meanwhile he sat listlessly gazing into space—or so he appeared to the bar-boy.

Half an hour later Val Vickers was talking to the bank manager over a telephone.

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"Please retain those numbers I gave you for the coded replies," he said. "I'm using them again."

After that he wired Ino.

HAPPY TO ACCEPT PROPOSITION AGAIN. ARRIVING IMMEDIATELY.

"By the sacred remains of my honorable grandmother," Ino snorted on receipt of the wire. "That stupid fool doesn't recall that I promised to pay him in American funds. Now if this deal goes through as easily as the last I'll make so much I can buy my way into the Supreme War Council."

And his smile was smug.

Four days later Val Vickers, Ta Fung-Fat and his various assistants were being welcomed by Colonel Tomashi Ino.

"I have wired my commanders that you are to be unmolested, as before," Ino beamed. Then to Val Vickers in an undertone, "Your success was so quick last time that I am starting you with one hundred thousand for this deal."

"Fine," Val said as he stowed the notes in an attaché case. He shook hands with the commander and was starting for the door when abruptly he turned.

"I say," he ventured, "your men obeyed their orders so carefully last time that I'm afraid they might have excited some mild suspicion among the Chinese. This time why not order them to mingle in the crowd around us. Their presence will help in promoting amity with the countryfolk."

Ino thought a moment. Then he beamed. "It is a good plan; it will look natural. I will order it."

TWO days passed before the stall was again erected in the Anwei market. But there would be no gambling, Val explained to the Japanese major in command of the city garrison, until his assistant, Mr. Ta Fung-Fat, returned from the interior where he was busily arranging for other plants in a half dozen cities.

The major, taking careful note of the foreigner's bland, open face, knew he was speaking the truth.

The foreigner was—up to a point. Mr. Ta Fung-Fat was in the interior, rightly enough, but he was not arranging for the opening of gambling stalls. Rather, he was busily engaged with an engraver who was glad, even anxious, to do his bidding. That bidding consisted of several long, uninterrupted hours bending over a mint bill of the Bank of Manchukuo.

When at long last he glanced up, he brought to Ta's eager eyes one of the most expertly counterfeited notes the gangster had even seen. Within an hour the small hand-press was turning those notes out by the hundreds, and within two days the impassively unflustered Ta was pulling at Val Vickers' sleeve with his free hand. The other held a heavy, battered rattan suitcase.

"Hokay," he whispered, proud of his ability to speak American. "Everyt'ing she set."

Val found it expedient to leave the Anwei stall and retire to his hotel room. There, after the door had been carefully locked and the shades drawn, he examined the note by the aid of a candle.

"The fellow who did this," he said finally and with an artist's appreciation for genius, "has a wonderful future. What did he charge?"

"No charge," Ta responded. "Him got patriotism."

"Excellent," Val said. "We open at once."

That opening was known far and wide within a sundown. Chinese in the deep interior dug into long-buried pots of money and thronged cityward for the chance of risking a little for a lot. When they won they were paid off in genuine Manchukuoan bank notes, for Val was not yet ready to pull his coup.

Similarly Ta's aides in the surrounding territory lowered their shutters and opened their tables, but with them as with the stall in Anwei all transactions were in genuine bills. They were waiting for a signal.

At the end of the first week Val returned to Chinghong without a legitimate

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Manchukuoan note in his possession.

"We worked them all off," he said to Ino, blending his smile with that of the commander. "Here's the Chinese money we got in exchange."

Then he sat by as Ino wired Shanghai. And if he received the bank manager's acknowledgement in the coded reply without any show of elation, that fact escaped his host.

"Why not end this thing in a big killing?" he asked finally. "Those natives are so crazy to gamble that we ought to cash in before some rabble-rouser gets to them and preaches patriotism. Let me take three hundred thousand this time."

INO mulled over the suggestion a long moment. Try as he would he could see no way he could lose, and in making the killing he talked of the stupid pig of an American was only boosting him closer and closer to that seat on the august Supreme War Council. Why, he might even become an intimate of the Emperor!

"Good," he said eventually. "We should carry this out before they wake up."

So saying he went to a wall safe and produced the required notes. Val stowed them away, shook hands and departed.

Reaching Anwei he paused only to send carefully worded telegrams to his outlying plants.

They caught the cue and what happened with them was exactly what was happening at Ta's booth.

The Japanese soldiers standing on the edge of the crowd were beckoned closer by the spieler. Laughingly he invited them to match their skill at the table, to guess the dice numbers that would turn up, or the number of buttons that would remain when the fan-tan shell was removed. The invitation was accepted, and Val Vickers breathed more easily.

As he watched eagerly he saw that the soldiers tendered notes of the Yokohama Specie Bank. But the notes they got back when they won were not the ones given Val by Ino. They were the counterfeits.

Yet when a Chinese pushed forward native bills or silver, he was paid off, on winning, in legitimate issues. The switch was made in the case drawer by Ta's nimble fingers.

But there was a sudden hitch which Val hadn't foreseen. As the gambling fever reached new heights he saw that the rabid Chinese were crowding the Japanese soldiers to the rear. Having been ordered not to antagonize the natives, the Japanese reluctantly let themselves be pushed aside.

Yet Val solved that as he'd solved many another problem through a crowded career. A whisper to Ta and word went through the native tea houses that the invaders were only waiting for a big enough throng of Chinese to gather—before they'd all be corraled and shot.

The next morning not a native was to be seen. Their places were taken by hundreds of avid Nipponese. Oriental psychology about gambling being what it is, when one crowd was cleaned there was always another waiting. And the knowledge that frequently there was a winner was an added incentive. That the winner invariably stayed until he, too, was cleaned, was a fact no one paused to dwell upon.

Meanwhile the fake notes were pouring over the counters in a steady stream. And with a similarly mounting trend grew the piles of Yoko Specie issue in the cashier's drawers.

VAL VICKERS never went back to Ino with the take on that final three hundred thousand. At the end of the week when he might have gone back, he nonchalantly was buckling the straps around two bulging kit bags.

And reposing in the pockets of innumerable thousands of Japanese warriors were counterfeit bills which had not yet had time to reach the central bank of issue in Chinghong. When they did, anything might happen, Val reflected, even to a revolt inside the Nipponese Army.

But one thing he knew—there'd be a noisy investigation of the gamblers, and of the big-shot who had given them permission to operate.

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Glancing wryly at his own fat take in the deal, and thinking of the pin money awaiting him in the All-America, Val knew it was time to pull out. Ta's connections were such that an automobile was procured, and the poker-faced American was soon speeding north across the wind-swept tundra.

Meanwhile the bulging-waisted Ta and his aides had lost themselves in the limitless expanse of Manchukuo. They'd split into a dozen groups, divide their cumsha, and within a month they'd one by one filter into Shanghai.

But as Val Vickers watched the swirling cloud of dust settle behind him and obliterate his tracks, he suffered an acute attack of conscience.

Oh yes, Vickers had a conscience; make no mistake about that. It was only that it was a thought more elastic than other men's, and operated in a slightly different fashion.

"After all," he ruminated, "I *did* bilk those Chinese. I can't have that preying on me. There should be some way . . ."

He must find that way.

SHORTLY thereafter a strange story was whispered through the native tea houses in the territory where the gambling stalls had operated.

Somewhere nearby was a crazy foreigner who roared into a town, or a farmyard, or stopped people on the road, beamed on them and passed out sheaves of Chinese bills and showers of silver. For good measure he was also scattering wads of Manchukuo bank notes.

In truth, the oldsters smiled knowingly, he was more likely a geni out of the classics who had returned in the hour of Cathay's oppression and was making the people rich beyond their dreams.

Fistfuls of gleaming coins, wads of paper currency, flung before their feet—truly this was the work of some thoughtless but generous deity.

By the time the Japanese secret service had wired the story to Chinghong, Val Vickers was setting his course for Ban-Ling on the Manchukuo-Soviet border, a thousand miles away.

The town was asleep when he roared into it like a phantom out of the ghoulish, black night which blanketed the countryside. No stars shone; and across the narrow river which was the dividing line lay the dim shores of safety.

While he unlimbered his bags, his chauffeur routed out the native who ran the ferry, a single sampan poled from the stern.

Warming himself with a bowl of steaming soya-bean soup in the lone noodle house remaining open, Val looked into the darkness and congratulated himself that he'd written finis to a deal from which his reputation would in no wise suffer. Oh, he was next to being broke again, naturally; but his sense of honor was upheld.

And that, to a man in Vickers' slightly dubious profession, could come to mean more than anything.

When the chauffeur returned with word that the bags were aboard and all was ready, Val jaid him off with a generous fistful of Chinese currency. For interest he added a wad of Yoko Bank notes. Then he watched the car disappear into the void south ahead of a flame-spitting exhaust.

Hurrying through the town to the riverbank, he found the sampanman with the ever-present three *wonks* that no Chinese boatman would think of being without. And he was about to step aboard when a guttural voice arrested him.

"Vickers, I've flown up to see you. You weren't leaving?"

Swinging about apprehensively, Val saw the hulking form of Colonel Tomashi Ino mirrored against the backdrop of the deathly quiet settlement.

"You weren't running away, Vickers," the voice continued, drawing nearer, "not with an investigating board due from Tokyo and me needing the *real* culprit in all this. It's an affair of honor, Vickers, that only you and I can settle, eh?"

For answer, Val said nothing. There was nothing he could say. As Ino closed in he was seeing the lurking menace behind the

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commander's broad smile, the tiny pinpricks of ebony that were his eyes over the cruel, drooping corners of his mouth.

"I need you, Vickers," he plunged on in an avalanche of words as he shambled down the banking. "Yes, I need you, you half-pint foreign crook. I need you dead and I'm killing you with my hands as I'd kill a dog. If I took you back alive, Vickers, you'd talk, eh? But dead I'll have things my own way."

Val Vickers prided himself that on never carrying a gun, depending on his nimble brain in moments of stress. But now his brain was calling on his muscle, and as Ino got within range Val put all he had behind a right hook for the squared, yellow jaw.

He felt it crash home with a numbing, flesh-ripping stab of pain that told him a bone had given in his knuckles. And he saw Ino go down, backward, the bluster gone out of him. Then Val set himself for the plunging rush he knew would overwhelm him, the butting that was a traditional part of Japanese rough and tumble.

BUT it never came. Instead, he saw a movement of Ino's pudgy right hand. There was a dull flash of gunmetal, a cracking report on the chill night air, and a slug whined close to his ear.

That it did not land he laid to an unforeseen happening. In the split second when he caught the glint of blued steel, he was surrounded by a welter of yelping, snarling *wonks*. So powerful was the attack that he was felled in his tracks; his arms went about his head for protection and he lay still to feign death.

The ruse was unnecessary. The dogs sniffed him, quieted; left as quickly as they had come, bounding across the intervening space; and what Val Vickers heard after that he preferred to forget. For he knew he couldn't have done any good had he made the attempt—not with the sampanman urging his half-savage curs on with low-voiced encouragement.

As Val picked himself up—oddly enough it seemed to him later—he was recalling some sage advice given him his first day in Manchukuo.

"When no dogs bark at an outlander," it had gone, "it is because he has been so long here he has come to smell like a Chinese. Therefore the wise foreigner gets out."

Taking that advice to heart, Val stepped into the sampan.

The coolie poled off the bank and the frail craft shot into midstream. Somewhere there was a commotion behind him and Val Vickers looked over his shoulder. The three brutish *wonks* were swimming in the sampan's wake; and as the foreigner absently trailed a hand in the cold water, one of them licked it.

IF YOU WANT THE LADIES TO LIKE YOU

—HOME AGAIN SWEETS—AND HOW KISSABLE YOU LOOK!
—YOU, TOO, DEAR—IT WAS NICE OF YOU TO SHAVE AGAIN BEFORE COMING HOME—
—DON'T BE SILLY! I DIDN'T!—I USED THAT SAMPLE OF LISTERINE SHAVING CREAM YOU SENT FOR—IT'S A WONDER!
—IT WOULD BE! —LISTERINE PRODUCTS ARE SO WORTH WHILE!
—NO FOOLING SWEETS—I NEVER HAD SUCH A SHAVE! THAT WIRY BEARD JUST SEEMED TO FALL OFF! —AND NO IRRITATION AFTER—I'M SOLD ON LISTERINE SHAVING CREAM FOR LIFE!
Clip this Coupon

20 FREE SHAVES

Lambert Pharmacal Co., Dept. 132, St. Louis, Mo. Please send me free and postpaid your large sample tube of ☐ Listerine Shaving Cream; ☐ Listerine Brushless Cream. (Check whichever is desired.)

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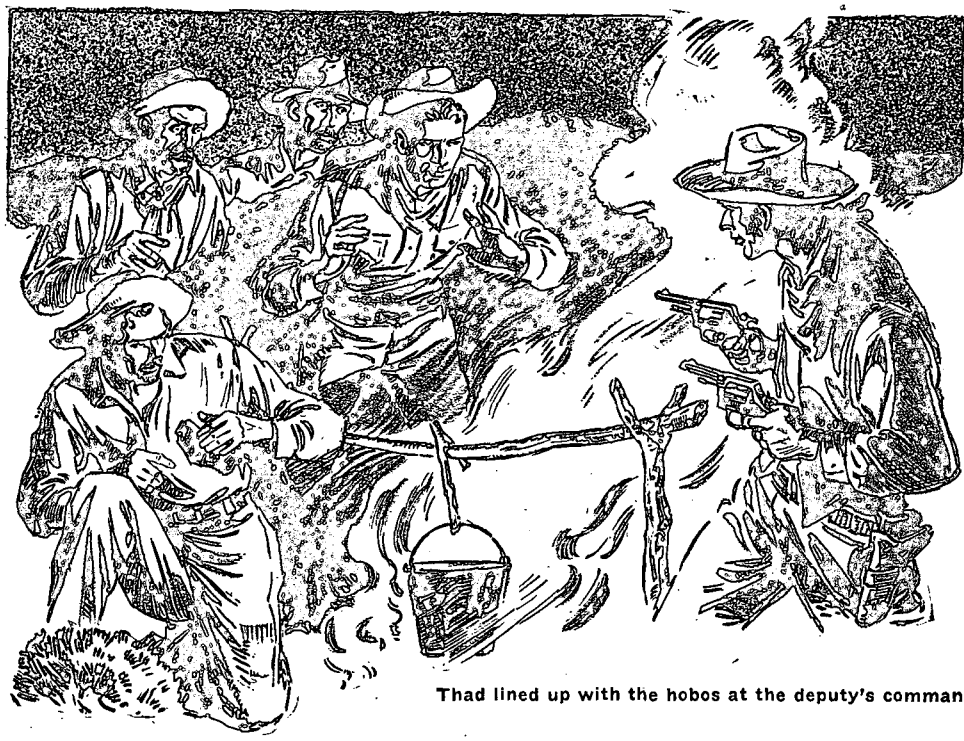

Thad lined up with the hobos at the deputy's command

Rawhide Road

By BENNETT FOSTER

THAD BREATHEA becomes an outlaw in spite of himself. Because Thad has a claim on the Lazy S ranch, his step-uncle, the furtive Dale Krespin, doublecrosses him so neatly that Thad lands in jail. But young Breathea is broken out by the outlaw Brick Mahoney; and the two men set out on a hazardous and exhausting flight, during which Mahoney is badly wounded.

Meanwhile, Dale Krespin hires gunmen to hunt down Thad and eliminate him permanently. So far Krespin and his foreman, Ben Prince, have managed nicely to get away with murder. But the melancholy, competent sheriff's deputy, Charlie Farrel, begins to get an inkling of Krespin's skullduggery.

THAD BREATHEA and Brick Mahoney, hunted men with a price on their heads, continue to stay two jumps ahead of the law. Finally, however, they get separated; and Thad rides a boxcar to the town of Alta. There he has the grim privilege of witnessing a hanging. Weary, unkempt and hopeless, he doesn't know where to turn next, yet he must stay clear of the law and find his companion Brick. . . .

CHAPTER XVIII

HAY HAND FROM TEXAS

AFTER a time Thad straightened from the wall. Memory of the hanging deadened the sharp hunger that had brought him into town, but he could not go back to the trees beyond the stockyards. He could not leave the company of people.

The will of the people had afforded the grim spectacle that he had seen; yet now, paradoxically to have people about him

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brought him a measure of comfort, of relief. Thad walked down the street, not looking back at the courthouse and the empty scaffold, from the cross-beam of which a limp rope now dangled.

When he came to the corner, he hesitated. Dregs of the crowd that had witnessed the hanging still eddied along the street. Men came out of stores and saloons, and now an occasional woman or child showed among the crowd. Thad heard the shrill voice of one small boy persistently plaguing his father for details of the tragedy.

As Thad stood, undecided as to what to do, a tall man, black mustached, the hair at his temples touched with gray, came from the store behind Thad and crossed the sidewalk to a buckboard. The man helped his companion, a girl of perhaps sixteen, into the buckboard. Standing beside the wheel, he spoke to her.

"I'll be back in a minute, Childress," he said. "I've got to get a man to go out with us." He stepped up on the sidewalk again and the girl said: "All right, Dad."

The tall man moved toward an adjacent saloon and two men stopped and spoke to him. "How are you, Mr. Vermillion?" one asked. The other said: "Are you goin' right out, Morgan?"

"As soon as I get a man," Vermillion said. "We're haying." He stood exchanging pleasantries with the two, and Thad listened with half his attention. He was looking at the girl.

She was young and startlingly lovely. Her dress, of some flowered stuff, was crisp and becoming, and her small cameo-like face was tilted up toward the sky like the face of a flower. She sat there curiously remote from the bustle in the street around her. Then suddenly she turned to speak to a passerby, and the smile lighting her face made her no longer remote, she was gay, eager.

Abruptly Thad's attention was drawn away from the girl. A heavy-paunched man wearing a black hat and another leaner man were hustling two disheveled specimens along the walk. Thad stepped back to be out of the way. One of the men being pushed along was slight and red-haired. The other was larger, black-bearded. Both were dirty, and both were expostulating. There was no mistaking the whining voice of the red headed man. He was Red, the man of the boxcar, the man whom Thad had forced to jump. The other must be Chink.

"We ain't done nothin'," Red whined. "We're tryin' to get to California. We're just a couple of bo's."

The fat man, pushing Red along, growled deep in his throat. "Concha wired us to be on the lookout for you. Yo're Brick Mahoney, that's who you are. Don't try to lie!"

"I ain't!" Red shrilled. "I ain't—"

He was past Thad now, but he turned to look at his captor. Catching sight of Thad, he struggled to free himself. "There he is!" Red shrilled. "That's the one!"

The fat officer jerked him around and pushed him along, but sudden terror struck Thad. Red had recognized him. He took a swift step back, reached the side of the saloon and was seized by an idea. Morgan Vermillion was still in front of the saloon, he and his two acquaintances watching the progress of Red and Chink along the street. Thad spoke to Vermillion.

"I heard you say you needed a hand," he said, his throat dry and his voice a little edged with his tension. "I'm a good hand in hay."

VERMILLION'S eyes were very black and very sharp. They searched Thad's face, passed to his broad shoulders and on down along narrow hips and long legs to booted feet. A glint came into the black eyes. "What's your name?" Vermillion drawled.

Thad thought rapidly. "Ted . . . Smith," he answered. "I've made hay. I can drive a mower or a rake or stack. I—"

Vermillion's lips curved a trifle and the amusement was plain in his black

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eyes. "You want a job pretty bad," he said. "You've done a little ridin' too?"

"Yessir."

"Where are you from?"

Again Thad thought rapidly. "Texas," he answered.

Vermillion laughed and the two men with him grinned. "And you're pretty hungry and you want to eat," Vermillion said. "I never saw a cowboy that was worth a damn at anything but ridin,' but I'll give you a job. Got a bed?"

"No sir," Thad said.

"I can fix you up, I guess," Vermillion announced. "You go crawl into the back of that buckboard over there. Tell Childress you're going to work at the ranch. I'll be along in a minute." He chuckled at some joke of his own, his companions laughing with him, and then he pushed on the half-shutter doors of the saloon and went in. Thad walked across to the buckboard.

"I'm the man that's going to work at the ranch," he told the waiting girl. He went around and climbed into the bed of the vehicle.

And kept quiet.

Vermillion came out of the saloon wiping his lips with a handkerchief. He nodded to one or two men, untied his team, and climbing to the seat of the buckboard, drove along down the street toward the south. At the edge of town Vermillion followed a road that angled off toward the east, crossed the railroad tracks and let the horses trot along. Turning his head so that he looked over his shoulder, he grinned at Thad.

"Texas, huh?" he said, and chuckled.

"Yessir," Thad answered.

"You never saw Texas," Vermillion grinned. "You don't have the kind of talk that comes from Texas. You come from the north—Colorado, likely."

Thad maintained a wise silence.

"And your last name is no more Smith than mine is," Vermillion jibed. "Don't pick Smith the next time, Ted. Better use Jones or Brown."

"Yessir," Thad said.

"Why'd you leave Colorado? Get into trouble?"

Thad saw the amusement in the black eyes. He grinned. "I robbed a bank," he said gravely. Vermillion burst into laughter.

"You don't need any more lessons," he said. "I don't guess your trouble was very serious. Probably you had a fight with your dad and decided to pull out on your own. Well, I'll make a hay hand out of you."

The buckboard rattled on southeast. From time to time Morgan Vermillion spoke to Thad or to his daughter. The girl's laugh was quick and light. There were long silences too, when the rattle of the harness and the whir of the wheels and the steady plop of the trotting horses seemed to make the quiet a friendly, pleasant thing.

WITH the sun low behind them, they reached a stream and followed down it. The stream became a series of holes in wide grasslands and Vermillion looked back to Thad and said: "Is that hay enough to do you?"

Thad agreed, and they swung across a vega, the wheels silent on the soft earth. Rounding a low point they came upon a house and barn set about by haystacks and corrals.

"Unhitch, Ted," Vermillion directed. "Turn the horses into the big pen and put the harness in the barn, and then come on up to the house."

He climbed down and helped his daughter alight. Burdened with packages, they walked toward the house. The door opened and a gray haired woman came out on the porch and kissed both Vermillion and the girl. Thad took the lines, drove the buckboard under the shed, backing it in expertly. He unhooked the tugs and took the horses to the barn.

He had unharnessed the team and was hanging up the harness when an elderly man appeared at the door and said casually, "I'll turn the horses out, kid." He led the bay team away.

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Thad finished with the harness and came out of the barn to see the gray haired man turning the horses through a wire gate. Over by the bunkhouse four or five men loafed, leaning against the wall, the small drawl of their voices drifting across to Thad. From the cookshack beside the bunkhouse came an aroma of food and hot coffee; it reminded Thad that he was ravenously hungry. He had started toward the house when the gray haired man came up to him.

"Ted Smith, ain't you?" the man asked, a little humor in his voice. "I'm Carl Logan. Vermillion said that you could come up after you'd ate supper. It's about ready."

The cook stuck his head from the door of the cookshack and drawled: "Come on an' eat, you fellers." Thad followed Logan to the cookshack.

At the table there were casual introductions. Thad met Shorty Coventry, Ben Nichols, Murray Blane, Ken Moore, Walt James. Logan, evidently, was the foreman, Blane and Nichols the riders.

The talk was small during the meal, for the men were hungry and weary. The cook, Patsy, hovered over the table, pouring coffee, bringing in more bread. Finished, the men stacked their dishes, carried them to the kitchen, dumped plates and cups in one pan; knives, forks and spoons in another.

"Now we'll go to the house," Logan said, and fell in step beside Thad.

Vermillion, his wife and Childress were on the porch, Vermillion smoking a cigar comfortably. He nodded to Thad, said: "This is Ted Smith, mother," and turned to Logan. Mrs. Vermillion looked at Thad, smiled and said: 'I've got some blankets for you, Ted. You need to borrow a razor."

"Yes ma'am," Thad agreed.

Vermillion said, "You get a dollar a day and your board, Ted. Give him a rake to drive tomorrow, Carl."

Thad felt that he was dismissed. He gathered up the clean blankets from the porch steps, said, "Good night," awkwardly, and walked back to the bunkhouse. At the cookshack door he paused. "Have you got enough hot water for me to take a bath, Patsy?" he asked the cook.

Patsy grunted, but Thad could see that the cook was pleased. "Haul in that tub outside," Patsy directed. "I'll have plenty of hot water. An' if you want to wash yore clothes I'll loan you a pair of overalls."

Thad said, "Thanks," and carried his blankets into the bunkhouse.

Later, in the kitchen, he scrubbed his clothes, dressed in a pair of the cook's voluminous overalls. Then, filling the tub he dragged in from outside, he tempered the cold water with hot from the cistern on the stove and reveled in soap and the silken flow of water against his skin.

Up on the porch Carl Logan, reporting to Vermillion, drawled: "He asked Patsy for hot water an' soap. He washed his clothes an' he's washin' himself now."

In the shadows Vermillion's wife said: "I knew he was a good boy." And Morgan Vermillion chuckled.

"You have to see them, don't you, mother?" he remarked. "Likely he's an outlaw on the dodge."

"He's a good boy, just the same," Mrs. Vermillion said placidly. "Go to bed now, Childress."

Thad went to bed in the bunkhouse. There was a brand carved in the wall above his bed, the same brand that he had seen on the team coming out: a Flying V Bar. He went to sleep looking up at the place where the brand was carved, with the gentle snores of his companions about him. For the first time since his father's death, Thad felt a tranquility, an ease all about him.

CHAPTER XIX

DAYS ON THE VEGA

IN THE morning the feeling persisted. Morning came mighty early at the Flying V Bar; four o'clock heard the cook's call of, "Roll out." But sleepy and stiff as he was, Thad felt at peace. Four o'clock

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wasn't very early. It was just a good getting-up time.

He went with the others to do the chores, watched Murray Blane ride out on a wrangling horse to bring in the remuda, and saw the horses come in. Logan, the foreman, pointed out his team. Back at the bunkhouse Thad took his turn at the washbench, ate breakfast and then went with the others to the pens once more. He harnessed his team and with satisfaction walked behind the chunky horses down to the shed and hooked them to the buck-rake that Logan said he was to handle.

From the headquarters the hay crew proceeded to the nearest vega. There, while two mowers began the round, Thad helped set the stacker. Vermillion had come down with the others and only Blane was riding. Everybody at the Flying V Bar worked on the hay.

There was hay on the ground, cut the day before. The rake men waited for this to be dried by the ascending sun. When it was dry enough, Coventry bunched it with a dump-rake. Nichols and Logan were driving mowers. Vermillion himself had the stacker team and Walt James was on the stack. That left Thad and Ken Moore to buck the hay into the stacker.

Thad swung his team out, dropped his rake and began to pick up hay. When he had the rake loaded he drove in, swung his team expertly to land his towering load on the teeth of the overshot stacker and, backing them off, started out again. He noticed that Vermillion watched him closely for the first few loads; after that he paid no more attention to Thad than he did to the other hands.

The field was odorous with the smell of freshly cut grass. Thad's team, working at either end of the buckrake, were old enough to know how to handle their job and young enough to have plenty of life. Thad could drive a team, had handled horses all his life, and when he came in with his sixth load he was whistling. Vermillion grinned at him.

The overshot stacker banged away, throwing hay up on the stack; Vermillion drove the stacker team and cleaned up around the stack with a fork, and James, on top, handled the hay and stacked it, keeping the middle packed and the edges even. It was mighty good to be in the hayfield.

About ten o'clock Childress came down from the house, mounted on an upstanding, spotted horse. She had a whole sack of doughnuts and everybody knocked off for ten minutes to eat them and to drink cool water from the burlap-wrapped jugs. Then the girl was gone and the work was taken up once more.

At noon teams were unhooked and taken to the barnyard where they were grained. Dinner was hot and plentiful, and there was time to stretch and light pipes and cigarettes before returning to the field.

Back in the field again the stacker was moved and staked down and the endless round of haymaking went on. About four o'clock Childress came down again, this time with lemonade, cool from the spring house. At six o'clock when work ceased, Thad unhooked Buck and Bess from their singletrees, climbed up on Buck's broad back and, with his hands on the hames, rode back to headquarters, at peace with the world and with himself.

ONE day marched into the next without pause, without intermission, without friction. Gradually the tension in Thad's mind eased, gradually he relaxed. No one asked him any questions; he was accepted as a workman, a man who had a job and who could do it.

At the end of the week they had finished the first big vega and were ready to go to the next, and at the end of the second week Morgan Vermillion paid his hands in good hard money and green bills. Carl Logan was going to town and Thad sent in for shirts and socks and another pair of overalls and a neckerchief.

On Sunday the Flying V Bar rested. Only Thad and Shorty Coventry were left at the place, the others having departed on various missions. Walt James had gone

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to see a girl at Alta; Logan was in town. Blane and Nichols departed upon an unstated mission, Ken Moore went home to visit his folks, some fifteen miles away. Even fat Patsy, the cook, had an errand in town.

It was a pleasant day.

Thad and Coventry ate Sunday dinner at the big house with motherly Mrs. Vermillion presiding at the table and Morgan carving the roast. After dinner there was a long quiet afternoon before it was time for the others to come back and the chores to be done, and Thad and Coventry loafed in the bunkhouse. Coventry wanted to talk and Thad let him. Presently they were discussing Vermillion and the Flying V Bar.

"He's been here a long time?" Thad asked. "He isn't very old, is he?"

"Fifty, mebbe," Coventry answered. "He's older than he looks. He's only been here since Childress was born. He settled down when she come."

Thad glanced at the other man. Coventry was perhaps fifty years old himself and looked his age, whereas Vermillion appeared to be about forty.

"Morgan," Coventry said, "bought this place then. He's added to it right along an' he's got a real outfit, but before that he was an officer."

"An officer?" Thad lifted his eyebrows.

"An' a good one," Coventry said. "Morgan Vermillion done it all. He was a U. S. marshal over in the Indian Territory, he was a peace officer up in Kansas right at the end of the trail drivin'. He was just about everything."

The older man stopped and filled a pipe, lighted it and then drawled on. "Morgan," he said, "arrested me for stealin' cattle an' got me sent up for four years. When I come out he was waitin' for me an' he brought me out here an' give me a job. I've been workin' for him ever since." He puffed away at the pipe, eyeing Thad.

"But—weren't you sore at him?" Thad demanded.

Coventry waved an arm. "It was Morgan's business to catch me. He was sheriff in Alta then. He's been a damned good friend to me, Morgan has."

Thad sat still, digesting that. Outside the bunkhouse a horse went past, the steps uneven. Thad went to the door. Childress was riding her bay paint pony toward the barn, and Comanche, the paint, was limping. Thad stepped out and walked toward the barn.

WHEN he reached the building, Childress had dismounted and was looking at Comanche. Comanche was a gentle enough horse, cowpuncher gentle anyhow, even though he would not have been exactly safe in an Eastern park. "He's lame, Ted," the girl announced as Thad came up. "I went for a ride down the creek and he went lame, so I came back."

"Whereabouts?" Thad asked.

"His left front foot."

"Can you pick up his feet?" Thad asked.

"We had to throw him to shoe him," the girl answered. "I've never tried to pick up his feet."

Thad walked over to Comanche. The horse cocked his ears at the approach of a stranger, but Thad's voice was very soothing as he spoke. "What's the matter, huh?" Thad drawled. "Got a rock, did you? Need a li'l help, huh? Now look: I didn't do that to you. That was a couple of other fellows. I wouldn't hurt you on a bet."

Comanche liked it.

His voice droned on, comforting, soothing. His hand slipped from Comanche's bay neck, down over his white shoulder, across a bay forearm and on to white pastern and fetlock. Thad eased his shoulder in against the horse, talking all the time, pulled on the fetlock and up came Comanche's foot.

"Got a nail in it," Thad announced. "He picked one up in the barn probably. You get the shoein' outfit."

Childress hurried away into the barn and Thad continued to talk to Comanche and to hold up his foot. On the porch of the big house Morgan Vermillion

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watched the scene and smiled broadly. Comanche was letting Thad get away with something that he would have resented in anyone else. Comanche was plenty touchy around the feet.

"Look here, mother," Vermillion said, and his wife, getting up from her chair, came to the end of the porch.

Childress brought the shoeing box and put it down. Thad drawled words to Comanche and Comanche listened with cocked ears while Thad got the nippers out of the box and pulled the shingle nail out of the pinto's foot.

The job was done.

"There you are," Thad announced. "It was the nail, not me that hurt you." He put the foot down and, tentatively, Comanche tried his weight on it.

"Nothing very bad," Thad assured Comanche's owner. "It got into the quick a little, but it isn't bad."

Childress was beaming. "I'm glad of that," she said. "Can I ride him now?"

"I wouldn't till you see if that nail's going to make trouble," Thad advised her. "I'll unsaddle for you an' turn him out."

The girl nodded her thanks, and Thad led Comanche away.

When he came back after turning the horse into the pasture, Childress was still waiting at the barn. "Thanks," she said, smiling at Thad. "You come on up to the house. I baked a cake yesterday and I'll give you a piece. It isn't very good."

"I'll bet it is," Thad answered. He had been perfectly at ease until now; but walking beside the girl in silence, he had a queer sense of tension. It disturbed him, and yet he felt good in a new way.

On the porch Morgan Vermillion spoke to his wife. "There's a pretty good boy, mother. And he's a hand with horses. I wouldn't be surprised if I didn't find something for him to do after we're through with the hay."

Grace Vermillion smiled placidly at her husband and continued to darn the sock in her hand. "I thought you would when you brought him out," she said. "I think he's a nice boy, Dad."

CHAPTER XX

PARADISE IS LOST

SUNDAY evening saw the return of the wayfarers. Ken Moore came back first, shortly followed by Murray Blane, Ben Nichols, and James. Thad and Shorty Coventry did the chores, the milking and the feeding.

They had finished that when Carl Logan arrived in the ranch buckboard, accompanied by Patsy. Patsy had viewed the sights of Alta unwisely and too well. It required two of the boys to get the cook into his room and to bed, and in the excitement of trying to keep Patsy quiet, all else was forgotten. It was not until late, after an impromptu supper cooked by Shorty, that Logan gave Thad the clothing he had purchased. Thad put the package under his bed without unwrapping it. He grinned ruefully to himself as he did so. It seemed to him that he was always buying clothes and going off and leaving them. He hoped he wouldn't have to again.

Logan, now that Patsy was attended to, was full of news. There was a good deal going on in Alta and Logan retailed it. Uppermost in interest was the story he had concerning a joke on the Alta sheriff's office. According to Logan everybody was giving Kleg Peter and his deputies the horse laugh.

"They arrested a couple of fellows the day that Dunneman was hung," Logan said. "Kleg had a telegram from Concha to look out for Brick Mahoney and his pardner the Wyoming Kid. They was supposed to have jumped a train an' come south.

"One of the fellows that was arrested was red-haired and the other was young and kind of big and Kleg thought he had Brick an' his pardner. He throwed 'em in jail an' called the officers at Las Flores to come over.

"Charlie Farrel got to Alta this mornin' an' said that Kleg was all wet. He had a couple of bums. The worst part of it for Kleg was that the red-headed hobo had

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tried to tell him that the Wyoming Kid was in town an' standin' right on the sidewalk when the deputies taken these bums in.

"Now Kleg don't know what to do. The redhead seen this Wyoming Kid and Brick eatin' supper in a restaurant in Concha an' he seen 'em get on the train. An' a brakeman said that he seen a young fellow that answered the Kid's description get off a train outside the Alta yards an' go in to town. It'll just about ruin Kleg when election time comes around.

"What's Kleg goin' to do about it?" Coventry asked.

Logan shrugged his shoulders. "What can he do?" he answered. "He's let 'em both slip through his fingers an' arrested a couple of hobos that he had to let go. Kleg's pretty sick about it."

The talk went on, full of conjecture as to the probable actions of Brick Mahoney and the Wyoming Kid. The bank robbery at Las Flores was recounted and embellished and the killing of Kettleman was commented upon.

"They're salty, both of 'em," Murray Blane stated. "I wouldn't like to bump up against Mahoney or the other one either. They'd think no more of killin' a man than they would a gopher."

"I don't think . . ." Thad began, and stopped short. All eyes were turned toward him.

"What don't you think, Ted?" Pearl James asked.

"Oh nothin'," Thad answered lamely. "I was just going to say I don't think they'll catch those two."

James grunted, and shorty Coventry made comment. "If the boss started after them, you bet he'd catch 'em."

"Yeah, he would," Logan agreed.

The talk went on until Logan, announcing that he was going to bed, walked out of the big room to go to his own smaller one. After Logan's departure the others went to bed. Thad lay awake a long time after Coventry was snoring, looking up at the blackness overhead and pondering over what he had heard.

He could run, he knew. He could make a break and get away, but if he did it would cause a lot of talk and undoubtedly put Kleg Peter on his trail. It was better to stay and not run until he had to.

IN THE morning the hay crew moved to the upper vega. Because of the distance from the house they took along a wagon and a lunch and did not come in at noon. There was a water keg and feed in the wagon for the horses, and when noon came the men loafed in the wagon's shade. There again there was talk concerning the mistake made by the sheriff's office in Alta. Vermillion took some part, asking a few brief questions but not commenting.

That night Vermillion drove the wagon in. He called to Thad as he climbed to the seat and directed the youngster to tie the team to the wagon's endgate. "Come on and ride with me, Ted," he added.

Thad climbed up, and they started for the ranch. The wagon was the end of the procession and Thad watched the others riding ahead. The teams were strung out, each man riding one of the horses.

"You know, Ted," Vermillion said suddenly, "I think maybe I can use you after we're through with the hay. Did you ever break any horses?"

Thad nodded. "I've broke horses."

"Both my riders are getting kind of old to saddle a bronc," Vermillion commented. "Murray is a good hand with a horse and so is Ben. They can teach a horse something, but I'd like to have somebody younger to kind of take the edge off. Want to try your hand at it?"

"Yessir!" Thad said eagerly. He had been worried as to what he would do when the hay was finished. This brief interlude, this breathing spell in his flight, had seemed a paradise to him. He had for a little time, lost the wild fear of the hunted man, but he had known that his security was temporary. Once away from this haven, he must run again. And here was Vermillion holding out a hand, showing him a vista of future peace.

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"I saw you with Childress' pony last night," Vermillion said. "Comanche is gentle enough and safe to ride or I wouldn't let the girl have him, but he's a fool about his feet. I'll let you have a try at snappin' broncs. I've put off startin' them until right now, hopin' I could get a good bronc rider."

"I'll try my best," Thad promised.

The wagon rolled along. There was a loose box on one wheel and every time the wheel went around the box clucked against the skein. "You aren't in any bad trouble are you, Ted?" Vermillion asked suddenly, and then without waiting for Thad to answer: "A kid like you is mighty apt to think a thing's bad when it isn't."

He looked at Thad narrowly as he spoke and Thad turned away and watched the prairie country slide slowly along.

"You know," Vermillion said conversationally, "a man that's going to amount to anything usually gets into a jackpot or two. Generally speaking there's a time when he can step one way or the other. He's got to make up his own mind. Sometimes he kind of gets on the wrong side of the fence and has to go back and start over. That's all right if he does it."

"Suppose he don't do it?" Thad ventured.

Vermillion's face was stern. "Then he goes clear bad and in the end it gets him," the ranchman said. "Look at Rusty Dunneman. He wound up by gettin' hung. Take Brick Mahoney and this Wyoming Kid: They likely started out just like a lot of young fellows start, not doing anything that was very bad but just bein' ornery. Then they got in deeper and deeper and now they've robbed a bank and killed a man. They can't go back an' start over. They're in too deep."

"What'll happen to them?" Thad asked, managing somehow to keep his voice level.

"They'll get caught," Vermillion prophesied. "Sometime they'll slip up and the law will get them. Then they'll get what Dunneman got. Every man that believes in the law will be against them. They can't buck the world. They might get by for awhile but sooner or later they'll slip. A man like that is generally a wolf."

Vermillion's lips were a grim straight line and his eyes were bleak. After an instant he spoke again. "A young fellow can generally go back and clean up whatever little mistake he's made," he said, and the grim lips curved. "You think it over, Ted. You've got some friends, you know. Mother likes you and you've made a good hand for me in the hay."

"Yes sir," Thad answered automatically.

WHEN they reached the ranch Thad unharnessed both teams and attended to them. When he finished that he washed up and went to supper. The first edge off the crew's appetites, talk sprang up around the table, reverting, naturally, to the recent excitement in Alta. Opinions were expressed freely and Thad, finishing his meal, stepped back over the bench, carried his plate out to the kitchen and then went on outside. He sat down against the wall and the talk floated out to him.

"There's a reward out on Mahoney and the Kid," Carl Logan announced. "Five hundred dollars for their apprehension an' arrest. Maybe that's why Kleg is so sore."

A laugh went up at that. Then Walt James asked a question. "You sure about the reward, Carl?"

"I've got a handbill if you want to see it," Logan answered.

Silence followed the announcement. Evidently the reward notice was being passed around. Coventry said, "This description of the Wyoming Kid would fit a lot of people. It would pretty near fit you, Ken, an' it's a dead ringer for Ted."

Again there was laughter. Ken Moore announced, "Well, I was over to my folks' place the day the bank in Las Flores was held up. I guess that lets me out."

Murray Blane remarked, "Yore folks might have to testify, Ken. Mebbe Kleg will want that dinero so bad he'll pick you up."

A general scraping of the benches and the rattle of dishes in the wreck pan an-

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nounced the end of the meal, and the men came trooping out of the cookshack. It was not quite dark. Coventry walked over beside Thad, lighted his pipe and sat companionably smoking.

"What you got lined up when we're through hayin'?" he asked.

"Mr. Vermillion said that he'd put me to starting broncs," Thad answered.

Coventry nodded. "An' he'll have somethin' else for you to do after that," he prophesied. "Morgan likes you an' when he likes a man he'll stick with him."

Thad made no answer and Coventry said: "There's a ring around the moon. It's changin' too. We'll have a rain tomorrow." Knocking the dottle from his pipe, he got up and went into the bunkhouse.

Coventry's prophecy came true. In the morning there was a gentle drizzle that, before noon, grew to a storm. No man makes hay in the rain and the Flying V Bar hay crew stayed in out of the wet. When the storm broke after dinner and the clouds cleared away, it was too wet to go in the field. Logan put his men to work about the place doing the odd jobs that a ranch always has available.

Thad's chore was to grease the wagon. He got the vehicle up on blocks under the shed, took a wrench and removed a wheel. He was liberally daubing on the axle grease when Childress came down from the house and stood watching him. Thad stopped work and smiled at the girl.

"You've got grease on your cheek," Childress told him.

Thad reached up a hand and touched his cheek, thereby adding more grease. Both of them laughed.

"Dad says that he's going to put you to riding broncs," Childress said, "as soon as the haying's done."

"That's right," Thad agreed.

"Did you ever ride broncs?"

Thad had put back the first wheel and was busy with the second. The nut was stuck and he labored with the wrench, so intent on what he was doing that he paid no thought to his reply. "Sure," he said. "I rode broncs in Wyoming. Before I came down here I always had a bunch of green horses."

Childress sat down on a box. "I wonder what it's like in Wyoming," she said. "Is it like down here?"

The nut turned and Thad banged his knuckles against the hub and put them to his lips for he had skinned them. "About the same," he agreed absently. "Different kind of grass an' there's mountains."

"I'd like to go there," Childress mused. "I'd like to travel on a train. Dad says that he'll take me back to Kentucky when I'm older. Tell me about Wyoming, Ted."

SHARP anxiety shot through Thad. He knew that he had said the wrong thing. "I wasn't up there long," he said awkwardly. "I come from Texas, you know."

"Then tell me about Texas," Childress commanded.

"Well," Thad had never been in Texas and was caught again, "it's a pretty kind of country. You know Texas is awful big an' it's hard to tell about it."

"But just where you came from," Childress insisted.

There was no backing out. Thad had to talk. He hated to lie to this eager girl, but he had to say something. In desperation he invented a Texas that never was and will never be.

"There's lots of mountains," Thad said. "Big high ones with snow on 'em. They go a way up. There's—" Walt James came around the corner of the shed. He looked at Thad through narrow eyes for a long minute and then passed on without a word, going toward the house. Thad wondered if James had been behind the shed all the time.

"Go on," Childress said.

"Oh there isn't much to tell," Thad said. "It's just a place."

"Some day," Childress said, "I'll go there."

She stayed on the box while Thad finished the greasing. He was replacing the last wheel when the girl got up. "I wonder

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where Walt is going," she said, stepping out from the shed.

Thad came from the wagon and joined the girl, wiping his sleeve across his forehead, for the afternoon was hot and the shed even hotter. Walt James was riding off across the vega, heading northwest.

"Maybe Dad sent him to town for something," Childress said.

"Maybe," Thad answered and went back into the shed.

He finished with the wagon and helped Coventry set two posts in the corral. By that time the sun was low and Logan said that they would knock off. The men cleaned up; Thad, changing to his newly purchased clothing, loafed until supper was ready. After the meal they went out to do the chores.

Thad finished with his team and was going back to the barn with the empty morrales when Childress came down from the house again. She followed him straight to the barn and stood in the door while he hung up the feed bags. The other men had finished, all save Coventry who was milking, and Thad and the girl were alone in the barn. Thad did not notice how taut she was, and wide-eyed.

"You aren't an outlaw, are you, Ted?" Childress said suddenly. "Dad said at supper that—"

Grace Vermillion's voice came from the house: "Childress! Childress!"

"Mother wants me," Childress said. "You aren't, are you?"

Thad turned slowly. "I—" he said.

"Childress!" the call came again.

"I've got to go," Childress said. Turning she ran toward the call.

Thad stayed in the barn. He watched the door and no one appeared. Carefully, always watching the door, he went to the ladder and climbed into the loft. In a corner of the loft under a pile of old hay, he delved with his hands and brought out a cloth wrapped bundle. He had hidden the Bisley Colt and his spare shells in that bundle the day he came to the Flying V Bar.

Now he slipped the gun into his waistband, hiding it under his shirt as Brick had taught him, and put the spare shells in his pocket. Descending the ladder, he saw that there was still no one in the barn. He knew now why Walt James had gone to town. He knew why Morgan Vermillion had sent James in.

THERE was bitterness in Thad, a kind of hatred. All he had asked was to be let alone. He had made a hand, a good one. He had done nothing to Vermillion or to James or to any one of these men. But James had heard him mention Wyoming and had heard his fabrications concerning Texas and James had gone to Vermillion, who had sent him to town. Thad remembered the hardness in the ranchman's face when Vermillion said: "A man like that is generally a wolf."

The Bisley Colt nestled against Thad. "Every man that believes in the law will be against them," Vermillion had said, and too: "A young fellow can go back and clean up his mistakes," and, "You've got some friends, you know." Morgan Vermillion! The first inkling, the first suspicion he had that Ted Smith was Thad Breathea, alias the "Wyoming Kid," Vermillion had sent a man to town for the sheriff. If Childress had only . . .

No, Thad couldn't be angry with Childress. Childress hadn't known. She hadn't believed. She had come to him demanding the truth.

Thad Breathea stepped out the back dorr of the barn and slid it shut after him. He walked deliberately to the stack yard and through the stacks. On the far side he climbed the wire fence and in the dusk that now had fallen, he dropped off the level land into the bottom of the creek that ran through the horse pasture.

The moon was up and shed a faint light. Back in the Flying V Bar headquarters men sat in the bunkhouse and probably there was a pitch game in progress, with Coventry and Logan and Nichols playing. Up at the big house Mrs. Vermillion would be at work on her knitting or darning and Morgan would be sitting on the front

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porch and Childress back washing dishes.

Thad followed the creek toward the west. There was a long walk and many a climb ahead of him but not as long a walk or as steep a climb as those short thirteen steps he had seen Rusty Dunneman take. Over west there was a railroad and trains that ran toward the south and Franklin and Brick Mahoney—always supposing that Brick had gotten clear. Brick was the only friend he had; Brick was the only one who had stayed with him.

Thad grunted as he stumbled over stones, steadied himself and tramped on. For awhile he had thought . . . Well, what was the use of thinking? The little time of peace was past and he must run again. Run like any other hunted thing until, trapped at last, he would turn and face his hunters and pit his strength against them.

CHAPTER XXI

GAYCAT

CHARLIE FARREL sat on the front porch of the Flying V Bar ranch house and puffed slowly on his cigar. Vermillion occupied a rawhide bottomed chair beside him and Grace Vermillion's rocker made a pleasant creaking sound. Childress was on the top step, hands locked together, thin girlish arms extended, back bent so that her chin rested on her arms, occupying a position that only the very young and the very supple could achieve.

"I wish you'd come out yesterday," Vermillion said.

Farrel puffed on his cigar and nodded. "So do I," he agreed. "But it rained yesterday mornin' an' the road was bad an' Kleg wanted me to stay in town."

"He was here yesterday," Vermillion said, and paused.

"Yeah," Farrel drawled. He was quiet a moment after that and then spoke again. "I've been tryin' to find him. I've worked pretty hard at it. Funny how a break will come. If Kleg hadn't arrested those two bums an' if I hadn't come over to identify 'em an' then come out to visit you I'd never have hit his trail. Funny how things work out. I'm just a day late."

Vermillion tossed the stub of his cigar away and looked at Farrel. "Walt James heard the kid talkin' to Childress yesterday," he commented. "The boy's tongue slipped and he said that he was from Wyoming. Then he backtracked and said it was Texas and told Childress all about the high mountains with snow on 'em." He laughed, a short, harsh bark. "James came leggin' it up here to say that the boy working for me was the Wyoming Kid. I told James he was crazy."

"He's a good boy," Grace Vermillion announced from her rocker.

"Sure he's a good boy," Charlie Farrel agreed. "When he was picked up he claimed that somebody gave him those horses to hold. Then Krespin said that he'd never seen the kid, and when Mahoney and them came back and tied me up and took the kid out of jail I thought that the boy was with 'em. You'd have thought so yourself, Morgan."

Vermillion nodded.

"Now," Farrel took his cigar from his mouth and eyed it contemplatively, "I know that the kid was tellin' the truth. There was a Mexican in the Plaza that saw the kid take the horses an' heard what was said. An' there's been some things come up—Krespin is tryin' to cheat the kid out of what he's got comin'.

"I've got a letter from a lawyer up in Wyoming. He's comin' down. I'm goin' to have a poor time with him. I'm goin' to have a poor time all around. You see it's murder that I'm workin' on."

"Yeah," Vermillion drawled, "you told us."

Farrel paid no attention to the comment. "I sweated Branch Long a little," he recounted. "I wanted the truth about that Kettleman thing. Branch said Mahoney killed Kettleman. He said the Kid got up an' dressed, that he was in bed when the trouble started. I don't see how the kid could have had much to do with that. A naked man generally ain't in on the shootin'."

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"You told us that too," Vermillion reminded.

"And so," Farrel said, ignoring Vermillion's statement, "I come over here an' get a rig from the livery and ride out to see you an' stumble onto the kid's tracks. Funny, if I hadn't been a friend of yours I'd never of come out an' I'd never known how close I missed him."

"If Walt James had kept his mouth shut and hadn't gone leggin' it off to town the boy would still be here," Vermillion said darkly. "Walt is too good a hand at puttin' his nose in other people's business. That's why I sent him back to town with Kleg Peters this mornin'. I haven't got a place for a man like James, even if it does leave me short handed with the hay crew."

"Ummmm," Farrel said, around his cigar.

"And when you do find the boy, *if* you find him, I want to know about it," Vermillion stated. "I liked the kid and I'll back him up."

"He's a good boy," Grace Vermillion said again with conviction.

Childress' voice came from the step, light and clear and sweet. "I wonder where Ted is now," she said.

"That's what we'd all like to know," her father answered.

AND where was Thad Breathea? He was sitting on the sand, a mesquite bush, long and black ridged behind him and a fire blazing in front. There were three others beside Thad about the fire, battered, unkempt men, dirty, faces covered with beard stubble, almost like animals as they sniffed the stew that was cooking in a bucket on the blaze.

"Mulligan's good," one grunted, and the cook, squat, long armed as an ape and with an ape's face, stirred the stew and made answer.

"You put everythin' into a mulligan except the bread an' the coffee. How's the coffee comin', Frisco?"

The first speaker was Chicago Dave, lanky and a little contemptuous of the others for he was the oldest on the road. The Rambler was cooking and Frisco Shorty now got up from where he sat and peered into the lard bucket that held the coffee.

"Pretty near ready," he said.

"The mulligan's all ready," Rambler announced. "Let's eat." Selecting a coffee can from the pile beyond the fire he dipped it into the fragrant stew, carried it a short distance away and squatting down, produced a spoon from a pocket of his ragged coat. Thad took a can and helped himself to the stew. Having no spoon, he bent a can top and used that to shovel the stew into his mouth.

"How long you been on the pike, kid?" Rambler asked, looking at Thad.

"Not so long," Thad answered and lifted the coffee from the fire. "Coffee's boiled," he announced.

"Just a damned gaycat!" There was contempt in Chicago Dave's voice. "We oughtn't to let you eat with a real stiff."

Thad looked steadily at the speaker. He did not like Chicago Dave and made no effort to hide his dislike. "Try to stop me," he snapped, and ladled in another can top of stew.

"The pike's gone to hell," Dave remarked loudly. "A kid like you talkin' like that! Why ten years ago—"

"You told us all about ten years ago," Thad interrupted.

"Don't be so ringy, kid," the Rambler counseled. "Dave's been up an' down the road plenty. Where you from?"

"Where I come from," Thad retorted.

Rambler, an advocate of peace, changed the subject. "I wish we was out of Franklin," he observed. "Franklin's a hard town on 'bos."

"These country cops don't want to get tough with me!" Frisco boasted. "I know how to take care of them." His hand went in under his shirt and came out holding an eight-inch knife that glinted evilly in the firelight. "Just a little of this 'an they get pretty soft," Frisco declared.

"For Pete's sake put that up!" Rambler urged. "You don't never want to let one of these Franklin laws ketch you with a

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knife or a gun on you. I seen Denver after he'd served some time in Franklin. Denver had a gun on him when they caught him an' they like to beat him to death. Put it up, Frisco, an' have some more stew."

Frisco grunted and put the knife out of sight with a flourish. "Just the same—" he began.

"They give a man thirty days an' put him to work," Rambler said, and shuddered at the thought of work. "They're makin' a sewer system. Lord, but them shovels are heavy, an' it's terrible hot too."

A hard voice out in the dark said: "All right, you bums. Stand up an' put your hands up."

"THE law!" Frisco snarled and leaping to his feet made for the shadows. A shot cracked sharply. Frisco stopped his swift retreat, lifted his hands well above his head, and turned around slowly.

"That's right," commended the hard voice. "The rest of you act nice an' there'll be no trouble."

Thad was in the shadow. He was caught and fairly; there was no chance of his getting away. The mesquite blocked him to the rear and he had to cross the firelight to make his escape in any other direction. Still the mesquite gave him a chance. Surreptitiously drawing the Bisley Colt from under his shirt, Thad dropped it in the sand under the mesquite just as another voice, higher than the first but equally hard, demanded: "You there! What're you doin'?"

Thad stood up and lifted his hands shoulder high. A man came from the shadows into the firelight, a gun held low, not pointing at anything in particular but very prominent in his hand. "Line up!" he ordered. "I'll look 'em over, Lanky. Line up, you!"

Thad joined Frisco, Chicago Dave and the Rambler, standing in line. The man with the gun passed behind them, feeling of their pockets, tapping them under the arms and around the waist. From Frisco he took the knife that that traveling man had flourished and tossed it away into the darkness, stepping back a half pace.

"Carry a shiv, do you?" he questioned and dispassionately slapped Frisco with the barrel of his gun. A red welt leaped out along the side of Frisco's face and he staggered. The officer slapped again with the gun and this time Frisco went down.

Out in the dark Lanky commended his partner. "That ought to learn him, Babe."

Babe went on, completing his search, paying no attention to Frisco who got to his feet, holding the side of his face with his hands. "All right," Babe barked, "now make for the track an' go on to town. The judge is goin' to be glad to see you tomorrow. We're still diggin' a sewer." He chuckled malevolently and fell in behind his captives.

Before they reached the track Thad thought of escape. It was full dark now that they had left the fire and there might be a chance. As though sensing his thoughts the man behind him dug a gun into his ribs and spoke.

"I'm right behind you. Keep goin'."

Thad kept going.

The little procession passed the lighted depot where numerous bystanders all had comments to make on its progress; on up through town, presently to halt before the jail. There was no formality at the jail. Thad, Chicago Dave, Rambler and Frisco Shorty, blood running down his neck from the welts on his head, were shoved unceremoniously into the bull pen and the door clanged shut behind them.

There were about ten men in the bull pen, some of them sleeping on benches against the wall, others awake, some standing, some sitting. The arrival of Thad and his companions caused but little disturbance. The sleepers continued to sleep and those awake and sober enough to be interested asked a few desultory questions.

A turnkey coming to the door, looked through the grill and said: "Shut up, you!" and the bull pen lapsed into quiet. Thad picked out a place on the floor, lay down and despite the hardness of his bed, was soon asleep.

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CHAPTER XXII

A SKULL MEANS SAFETY

IN THE morning the four were arraigned before a police judge. That swarthy official, his English broken, was brief and to the point. Thirty dollars or thirty days was his judgment and, except for two drunken cow punchers whose foreman appeared and paid their fines, all the occupants of the bull pen were stuck.

Thad kept still when he came before the judge. He was afraid to speak out, afraid to say anything. He gave the name of Ted Smith to go on the blotter and aside from that and to say that he did not have thirty dollars, he maintained a discreet silence. He had decided that he would much prefer to be Ted Smith, serving thirty days for vagrancy, than Thad Breathea, wanted in New Mexico for bank robbery and murder.

Following the arraignment and sentencing, the men were taken back to jail. There Chicago Dave was told off to clean up the bull pen, empty the slops and otherwise care for the primitive sanitary arrangements; and the others, under the care of four guards, were marched out and along the street.

Thad was surprised at Franklin. He had never been in a town of any size save only Denver and his brief sojourn in the depot at Denver had hardly been instructive. Franklin sprawled among the hills. These were bleak, dotted with sparse desert growth, and to the southwest Mount Franklin scowled down forbiddingly upon the town.

Northward the smoke of the smelter mushroomed up against the sky, copper colored in the sun. There was smoke too above the railroad yards. The buildings were low, one or two storied with an occasional three-story sky-scraper bordering the sidewalks. There were hacks at the curbs and a yellow trolley car banged past, causing Thad to shy like a frightened horse.

As they marched they caught glimpses of the brown and sluggish river, and the talk that came to Thad's ears was drawling English or rapid sibilant Spanish.

"All right," the guard commanded, "you take shovels!" His finger singled out six of the prisoners. "You others get you a pick apiece. Come on!"

Thad, in possession of a shovel, climbed down into a trench under the guard's direction and laboriously began to throw dirt up on the ridge above the narrow cut. At either end of the trench a guard sat, one under a big striped umbrella, both with shotguns across their knees. The guns were Winchesters, Model 1897 pump and were sawed off until the barrel was no longer than the magazine. The other two guards patrolled the side of the trench, looking down at the men beneath them. They too carried sawed-off guns and occasionally their voices rose harshly as they cursed a loafer.

Thad shoveled dirt that Frisco loosened with his pick. There were brief intermissions when he rested and Frisco swung the pick, longer intervals when he lifted the long handled shovel, loaded full, and tossed the dirt out of the pit. The sun beat down like a sledge-hammer, pounding on the men in the trench until the blood in their heads throbbed. Rivulets of sweat ran from wet foreheads to join larger streams on chests and backs. Thad could feel the blisters growing on his hands.

"Come on! Shovel it out!" the guard said harshly.

At noon they were marched back to the jail. There were beans and bread and something that passed for coffee. For a short intermission they sprawled in the bull pen, the more fortunate who possessed tobacco, smoking cigarettes, the others, utterly weary, stretched on the floor. The stifling jail felt cool after the beating sun. Then back to the trench and the waiting shovels they went to resume their unending labor.

Evening was a relief. After a supper of beans, bread and coffee, they were herded into the bull pen and left to their own devices. And while the benches in the bull

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pen were hard and the floor even harder, still there were compensations.

The jail was not verminous and there was water with which to wash and there was always the chance that the evening would bring diversion. The town was hard, booming, tough as only a border town can be tough, and the police net caught some queer specimens.

Then too there was the kangaroo court presided over by the bully of the bull pen and attended by his sycophants. Thad fell prey to that rough court and perforce whipped the bully, beating him unmercifully. After that he was left alone and the kangaroo court lost much of its brutal prestige.

AT FIRST the labor in the hot sun was almost unbearable; then Thad hardened until his hands were like iron and his muscles were ribbons of steel that played under his sweaty, dirty skin. Some of the others were not so fortunate and some were more fortunate. Some of the prisoners fawned upon their guards and received favors. Some of them broke under the strain.

Frisco was one of these. Working in the trench under the hot sun, he lifted his pick high and, with it poised in the air, collapsed. A guard cursed him and then climbed down into the trench while the others stood by. The guard bent down over the prone Frisco, lifted the man's limp head, pushed back an eyelid with a calloused forefinger. Then climbing out, the guard bade Thad and Rambler lift the man. Two other prisoners carried Frisco away and Thad never saw the man again. Whether Frisco lived or died he did not know.

There were thirty men in the bull pen at the time of Frisco's collapse. The trench was long and not too deep, perhaps six feet. They had progressed from their first site and were further toward the town, following the line of stakes that engineers had set in the alley.

The morning of the day following Frisco's removal, Thad, marching with his fellows to work, glanced at the back of a two-story brick building. They had just entered the alley as he looked up, and he saw in a window of the building a pale face topped by flaming hair.

There was no mistaking it: Brick Mahoney was looking out of the window.

Thad stared at Brick, almost stopping in mid-stride. Brick looked down and then ducked hastily back from sight. He had not recognized Thad under his growth of beard and in his dilapidated, dirty clothing.

"Go on, Smith!" a guard growled.

Thad climbed down into the trench.

It was about ten o'clock when the break came. Thad, swinging a pick, struck rough boards and he pried at them, working them loose with the pick. A board and tattered, moldy cloth fell into the bottom of the trench and Thad, striking again with the pick, pried off another piece of board. Now a skull, a bit of hair still clinging above the ear hole, and several vertebrae together with the flat-ridged bone of a scapula tumbled into the trench. Thad stepped back.

"Hey," he called to the guard above him, "we've hit a graveyard."

The guard came to investigate. Thad passed up the skull and the scapula, pried again with the pick and uncovered the small bones of a wrist and hand, and the radius of an arm. Something glinted, and bending down he picked up a heavy gold ring. The guards had assembled above him and one of them demanded: "What you got there?"

Thad climbed up out of the trench and handed over the ring. The guard that was holding the skull dropped it and it bounced back toward the high board fence that lined the alley. Thad went to retrieve the skull, but the attention of the guards was centered on the gold ring.

Thad stooped, picked up the skull and was about to step back when he saw that he was opposite a gate in the fence. Directly behind the fence was the brick building in the window of which he had seen Mahoney's face. Thad pushed on the

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gate, it opened, and with a step he was through and the gate closed behind him. Dropping the skull, he ran toward the back of the building.

THE windows here were barred with long iron rods, but there was a door and it was open. Thad went through that door and into a room that smelled of beer and stale liquor. There was a stairs to his left, and he moved toward them only to be stopped by a harsh voice.

"What do you want?"

Thad turned. A man in a white apron, his face hard, was standing at the inner door.

"Brick's upstairs," Thad panted. "I've got to get to him; I've got away."

Suddenly, then, there was a shout in the alley, a clamoring of voices. The hardness left the face of the man in the white apron. "Brick?" he snapped.

"I'm his pardner," Thad panted. "I'm—"

"The Wyoming Kid!" the man in the apron exclaimed. "Here, kid, duck down here. They'll be lookin' for you." He pulled up a trap door as he spoke and Thad caught a glimpse of darkness and steps that led into it. Then he was on the stairs, going down and the door closed above his head. Thad reached the bottom step and crouched.

He heard feet tramp back and forth overhead. He heard voices but could not distinguish the words. A long time went by, hours it seemed to the waiting Thad; then the trap door lifted. "Come on out," directed the white aproned man, looking down. Thad climbed up the steps.

The saloon keeper caught him by the arm as he reached the top. The saloon man was fat and had a round, moonlike face and a pair of the smallest eyes Thad had ever seen. "They sure missed you, kid," he said, his face wreathed in a smile. "I met 'em at the back door an' told 'em you'd run west and went over the fence. They're still lookin' an' you'll have to be careful. Come on now an' I'll take you up to Brick."

With the fat man's hand guiding him, Thad found the stairs and began the steep ascent. At the top landing the saloon man knocked twice and then once. A key turned in the door and it opened slowly. Thad stepped into a room. Brick Mahoney, a gun in his hand, was just beyond the door, partially screened by it. Brick was in shirt and trousers and the shirt was tucked in little folds where the left arm should have been. For a long moment the two eyed each other and then Thad, taking a step forward, said, "Brick."

Brick Mahoney lowered the hammer of the gun. "Oh, kid!" he said.

CHAPTER XXIII

TWO-GUN OUTLAW WITH ONE ARM

THEY shook hands briefly after that. Brick putting his gun into his waistband to free his hand. And then they walked together to the cot that was against the wall and sat down. The saloon man remained beside the door, his round face smiling. Brick looked from Thad to the saloonkeeper and grinned.

"It's the kid all right, Arch," he said. "Thad Breathea. Kid, that's my brother-in-law, Arch Heibert."

Thad got up and shook hands with Heibert and thanked him. The grin never left Heibert's face. "Brick was worried about half to death when he didn't hear from you," he said. "I'm glad you got here. What are you goin' to need, kid?"

"I'd like to clean up and shave and get some clothes," Thad said. "I've been in the jug and digging sewers. I need to clean up."

"I'll see about gettin' you some clothes," Heibert promised. "Brick's got a razor an' you can get a bath in a barbershop after you shave an' change clothes. I'll leave it to you two fellows. You'll want to talk." He went out the door and closed it after him. Brick crossed the room after him and locked the door, and then came back to the cot.

"What happened to you, kid?" he demanded.

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"What happened to you first!" Thad said. "How'd you get here? You didn't get on that freight I caught."

Brick shook his head. "I knew what was happenin'," he announced. "I saw those fellows shootin' at you an' I yelled at you, but you didn't hear me. I caught the end of a car and went right across the coupling an' hit the ground an' run for the coal chutes. I hid in the chutes an' then I caught the blinds on an eastbound passenger an' went over into Colorado. By the time I got there I was pretty sick. Then I worked west an' hit the Santa Fe an' bought a ticket an' come straight here. I came right through Las Flores."

"You did?" Thad's face expressed his incredulity.

"I was travelin' on a Pullman an' I layed in a berth." Brick grinned. "You see this arm I lost was really givin' me hell then. I could say I was sick an' not be lyin'."

Thad nodded understanding.

"When I got here Arch an' my sister met me an' we went across to Mexico. The arm was infected an' a doctor over there took it off. He said he had to or I'd check out. I'd just about as soon of died as lose it but they didn't give me much chance to say what I wanted to do." Brick's eyes were morose.

Thad put his hand on Brick's shoulder. "You'll never miss it," he promised. "Not while I'm with you."

Brick got up, went to the barred window and looked out briefly. "Arch has been stakin' me," he said. "Arch wants me to go to South America. I can locate down there. Some of them big outfits need men that can handle cattle an' speak Spanish. I wouldn't go till I'd heard from you." He swung back from the window and looked at Thad. "A damned cripple," he burst out suddenly.

"You ain't a cripple," Thad said hotly. "South America sounds all right to me."

"You'd go with me?"

"I'll go any place you go," Thad promised.

The old sunny grin broke across Brick's pallid face. "What happened to you, kid?" he demanded. "You took plenty of time to get here."

"An' had a poor time doin' it," Thad said. "I'll tell you."

Briefly then he recounted his adventures, the ride on the train to Alta, the hanging of Rusty Dunneman, his job with Morgan Vermillion, his flight, his arrest in Franklin, and his work in the sewer trench.

"I saw you this mornin' looking out the window," Thad completed. "I knew then I was going to make a break. We dug into an old graveyard and I had a chance and took it. Now I'm here."

Brick's eyes were filled with curiosity as he looked at Thad. "Yo're hard, kid," he commented. "You were just a kid when we first hooked up. Now you're hard as I am, harder maybe."

"Who wouldn't be?" Thad shrugged. "One thing sure, Brick, they'll never take me; not now, not after what I've seen and what's happened to me. They pick up a man for being a bum and give him thirty days in Hell. Then if they can get him again they stick him again. There's no square deal about any of it. Look at me: I never did a thing wrong, not a thing. What's happened to me was framed on me. Now by Glory, I'll take care of myself."

"Yeah," Brick nodded slowly, "you will."

THERE were two taps on the door, a pause and then a third tap. Brick crossed to the door and turned the key. Thad saw that Brick pulled his gun immediately. The door opened and a woman came into the room.

She closed the door behind her, put her shoulders against it and reached out toward Brick. Brick bent and kissed her. The woman was young, red haired and blue eyed, the rich blood in her cheeks showing through her milky white skin.

"I thought that was you, Ellen," Brick said. "This is the kid. He got here finally. Thad, this is my sister."

Thad bowed awkwardly, conscious of

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his bearded face, his worn, dirty clothing. Somehow he could not quite make this true in his mind. He had always pictured Brick as alone. To find that Brick had a family was a shock.

"Arch said that you had come." Ellen Heibert's voice was low and musical. "I'm glad. Now Brick will get away and out of danger."

"I haven't been in danger," Brick spoke quickly. "Not with you an' Arch lookin' after me. Don't the kid look good, Ellen? Ain't he all right?"

Thad was favored with a slow scrutiny of the blue eyes. Ellen Heibert nodded. "He's your friend, Brick," she said gravely.

"We'll get him cleaned up an' he'll look swell," Brick promised. "What's been happenin', Ellen?"

The woman shook her red head. "Nothing," she answered. "I came to see you and to see your friend. When will you be ready to go, Brick? We'll have to make arrangements."

"Pretty soon," Brick answered. "The kid's goin' with me."

"I'm glad!" Ellen thrust out her hand toward Thad in an impulsive gesture. "You'll look after Brick, won't you?"

"I'll stay with him," Thad promised.

"Arch is coming up," the woman said. "He has some clothes. I'll have to go now."

Again there came the tapping on the door. Ellen stood back and admitted Heibert. He had clothing laid across his arm. "I rustled some duds," he announced. "You better slip along now, Ellen."

The woman gave Thad a flashing smile, kissed Brick, and went out. Heibert tossed the clothing down on the bed. "Help yourself, kid," he invited.

When Heibert had gone Brick sat down on the cot. Thad, stripping off his dirty clothing, washed as best he could with water from a bucket, and then with the aid of a small mirror, a pair of scissors and Brick's razor, freed his face of its growth of beard. His skin was pale, and Brick laughed and joked with him. "Yo're as pale as I am, kid," Brick said. "But you look a lot better than you did."

"I feel better too," Thad agreed, dressing in the clothing Heibert had brought. "But I'm not clean yet."

Brick's eyes narrowed. "There ain't any reason why you can't go out," he announced. "Nobody knows you here. Cleaned up an' dressed the way you are, they'd never recognize you."

Thad nodded and finished his dressing.

For the remainder of the afternoon he sat on the cot with Brick. They talked, recalling the things that they had done together, reliving old adventures, harking back to the cave behind Alfredo Vara's goat ranch and the wild ride across country to the Rim. Gradually the light in the room diminished and presently Heibert came up with food for both of them. He looked with approval at Thad.

"You look a lot different," Heibert said. "If I hadn't brought you here I wouldn't know you."

"Think it will be safe for the kid to go out?" Brick asked.

Heibert studied over the question and finally nodded his head. "I think so," he said. "They've quit askin' about you, Brick. The marshal hasn't been around again. They probably think you've gone to Mexico. Nobody knows the kid here and I think he'll be safe."

"I want to get a haircut and a real bath," Thad said.

"I think it will be safe," Heibert said again. Accordingly the saloon keeper waited while his guests ate the meal he had brought and then took Thad with him. They went downstairs together and Heibert placed the tray on a beer keg. He led Thad with him on into the saloon.

THERE were no patrons in the place and only a bartender on duty. Heibert spoke briefly to the bartender and then drawing Thad aside, asked him if he had any money. Thad replied that he had none and Heibert gave him some bills. "You can pay me back whenever you get it," he said casually. "If you never do it's all right."

"I'll pay you," Thad promised.

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"There's a barber shop two doors up the street," Heibert directed. "Have you got a gun, kid?"

Thad shook his head. Going behind the bar, Heibert returned and passed over a short barreled, hammerless Smith & Wesson. "It's a lemon squeezer," he said. "A Thirty-two. I don't think you'll need it but it's handy."

"Thanks," Thad said gratefully. "I'm making you a lot of trouble."

"No." Heibert shook his head. "Brick set me up in business in this place. Brick's sister is my wife. Yo're Brick's friend. Anything I do ain't any trouble. You go on and get yore bath an' a haircut. When you come back I'll have a place fixed for you to sleep upstairs."

Thad nodded and left the saloon.

When he came back he was really clean, his hair cut. He felt as though he were a different person. Only the hat and boots remained of his original outfit and both of those needed replacement; still he did not feel inclined to spend any more of Arch Heibert's money on himself.

Heibert was behind the bar when Thad came in and there were several patrons in the saloon. It was not until these had left that Heibert had time to go upstairs with Thad. He accompanied Thad to Brick's room, Brick admitted them and Heibert pointed out bedding and another cot that had been brought up during Thad's absence.

For two days Thad stayed close in the room with Brick. They were fed by Heibert and visited daily by Ellen. On the afternoon of the third day she commented on Thad's boots and his hat, telling her husband that they should be replaced. Heibert agreed and when Thad demurred, Brick took a hand.

At length Thad relucantly agreed that he would buy new boots and a new hat, and Heibert said that he thought it would be safe enough for Thad to go out and get them.

Thad did not go out until late the following afternoon. He and Brick spent the morning talking about South America, discussing what they would do and how they would get there. Brick was filled with enthusiasm and Thad caught some of it. There was a change in Brick, Thad noted. Where before Brick had been hard and not inclined to regard consequences, now he seemed less calloused and more apt to weigh results.

About three o'clock Thad left Brick and went downstairs. Heibert had supplied him with money and Thad went along the street to a clothing store. There, in place of boots, he bought a pair of riding shoes. They were less expensive and he could get a fit in them. Thad found no difficulty in securing a hat. His selection was a small beaver-belly Stetson, the sort of hat a brush-popper from the pear country would buy.

When he left the store, he did not immediately return to the Palace saloon. Franklin interested him, intrigued him, and the fact that he had passed a man who had served as a guard to the sewer gang and received no more than a casual glance, had made him bold. If the guard had not recognized him, no one else would.

Thad stood on a corner under the shade of a tin awning and watched Franklin pass by, the clanging trolley cars, the hacks with their coatless drivers, the shuffling Mexicans in their sombreros, the troopers from Fort Blossum, all the life of the town moving sluggishly in the afternoon heat.

He did not see two men come from the saloon behind him, pause and survey him closely and then step back into the saloon. Had he seen those two he might not have so boldly walked back to the Palace when six o'clock came, for the two were Silk Gerald and Curly Winters.

CHAPTER XXIV

A STAKE FOR TWO

SILK and Curly stayed in the bar. They watched the tall youngster through the half shuttered doors. When Thad left the corner, Silk and Curly came from the saloon and followed him along the street

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until they saw him go on into the Palace.

They gave Thad a little time and then casually went into the saloon. Heibert's bartender was behind the bar and there were two men drinking beer and talking to him, but Thad Breathea was not in sight. Curly and Silk each bought a glass of beer, talked to the bartender and then left the place. Outside the Palace they stopped.

"That was him, sure," Silk stated.

"It was," Curly agreed.

"An' that's Brick's brother-in-law's place," Silk amplified. "One time Brick was talkin' an' he said his brother-in-law run a place in Franklin an' that his name was Heibert. You heard who the bartender said his boss was, didn't you?"

"Uh-huh," Curly grunted. "Heibert."

"The kid went upstairs," Silk announced. "That's the only place he could of gone."

"Unless he went out the back."

Silk shook his head. "I don't think so. I'll watch the front for awhile, Curly, an' you go around to the alley an' watch the back. See who comes out."

Curly nodded and departed.

Half an hour later he came back and rejoined Silk. "A Chink from the restaurant just went in the back with a tray," Curly announced. "I watched him go in the back door."

Silk's eyebrows lifted. "Then one of them is there for sure," he stated.

"Both of 'em," Curly said positively. "There was too much on that tray for any one man."

"So what do we do?" Silk asked.

Silence fell between them for a time, and then Curly offered a plan. "Let's go in an' ask about Brick," he suggested. "After all we was with him, wasn't we? We want to hook up with him again, don't we?"

"Try it anyhow," Silk said. "We'll wait awhile an' then go in."

Thad and Brick were in their room playing cribbage when the knock came. The time was tedious and they had resorted to cards to break the monotony. Brick was almost recovered from the amputation of his arm and was fretting at the restraint placed upon him; Thad too was restive, beginning to hate the narrow confines of their hiding place.

A few more days and they would leave. Arrangements were already made for them to cross the river and there pick up horses. They planned, once in Mexico, to work along toward the south and eventually reach Vera Cruz. There they could get a boat and go on to their ultimate destination: Argentina. Both were sanguine concerning the proposed venture.

It was a good plan, with almost unlimited possibilities for the future. They didn't see how it could fail.

There was, of course, the possibility that they would stay in Mexico. But they had become thoroughly imbued with the idea that Argentina was the place to go. The name intrigued their imaginations, and Arch Heibert had brought books and maps and the two had pored over them avidly, working out alternate plans.

Thad had just counted a twelve hand when the knock came on the door, two taps, a pause, then the third tap. He got up from the table, crossed to the door, and unlocked it. Heibert stood at the threshold and behind Heibert were Silk Gerald and Curly Winters.

"HELLO, kid," Silk said, not giving Thad time to say a word. "We didn't know you were here. We came to see Brick." As he spoke he stepped past Heibert and entered the room, Curly following him. Thad looked at Heibert inquiringly.

"They're all right," Heibert said. "They were with Brick. I know that."

Brick's voice, greeting the two, was cordial. As Thad turned he could see Brick shaking hands with Curly, and grinning. Thad nodded curtly to Heibert and stepped back into the room. He did not like this; he did not like it at all.

"You remember Curly an' Silk, kid," Brick said jovially. "Remember when they took you out of jail?"

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"Sure," Thad agreed. "I remember." He did not say that he also remembered that Silk and Curly had ridden off and left Brick and himself, but his eyes were dark with the recollection.

Silk came up and put out his hand. Perforce Thad took it. "We been tryin' to hook up with Brick ever since we split off," Silk said. "How did you make out, kid?"

"All right," Thad answered briefly.

"You had tough luck, Brick," Curly said. "Losin' that arm was a bad break."

Brick nodded soberly. "I'm about well of it now," he announced. "When did you boys get in?"

"Just now," Curly answered. "We had a tough time. We been on the dodge ever since we split up. We worked south an' when we got this far we looked for you. You remember one time you were talkin' about Franklin an' we kind of figured you'd be here. Silk remembered what you'd said about yore brother-in-law an' so we come."

"That's right," Brick said. "And I'm sure glad to see you."

"I'll leave you fellows," Heibert spoke from beside the door. "There's a pretty good crowd downstairs an' I'd better get back."

"Come up when you can, Arch," Brick called.

"Sure," Heibert answered, and went out, closing the door behind him. Automatically Thad turned the key.

Silk sat down on a cot. Curly took one of the chairs beside the table and looked at the cribbage board. "Gets kind of tiresome hidin' out," he suggested. "Gettin' pretty tired of it, Brick?"

"Damned tired," Brick corroborated. "It won't be long now though. Me an' the kid are leavin' pronto."

"So?" Silk said. "Where you goin'?"

"South America." There was pride in Brick's announcement.

Silk whistled softly. "That's a long ways off," he said.

Brick grinned good-naturedly. "Sure it is, but we don't figure on any trouble getting there. The Kid and me have traveled together before."

Curly toyed with the cards on the table. "You got a stake that will get you there?" he asked.

"We can get one," Brick answered. "Arch figures that he'll stake us."

Thad had not seated himself. He stood beside the shaded window, leaning back against the wall, watching the two visitors. Somehow Thad could not feel that this was a friendly visit. Now he interjected a word. "Brick staked Heibert," he said. "Arch told me all about it. Brick's got it comin'."

He glared defensively.

Curly disregarded Thad's comment. "Silk an' me been thinkin'," he drawled. "How'd you like to pull out of here with a stake of yore own? One that you didn't owe to nobody?"

"What have you got on yore mind?" Brick asked quietly.

"I'LL tell you," Curly answered. "Me an' Silk got a job staked out. We need some help. We want a couple of boys that we know we can count on an' we thought of you an' the kid. How'd you like to make five thousand dollars, Brick?"

Brick's eyes brightened and then faded again. "I ain't any good," he said. "This arm—"

"We'd ruther have you without no arms at all, than anybody else," Silk assured. "It's yore head that we want, Brick. We need some help plannin' this."

"What is it?" Brick asked.

"A payroll," Silk said. "There's a bunch of mines up around Gato. The payroll goes out to 'em twice a month an' it's a sweet pot. We would kind of like to look at that payroll, Brick."

"Gato," Brick said musingly.

"Up above Las Flores," Curly amplified. "Silk an' me know that country like a book. They haul the payroll out on a train. What do you think about it, Brick?"

"Gato," Brick said again. "That's a bad country for me an' the kid to go in to. You know that Kettleman business—"

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"Nobody is crowdin' you about Kettleman," Curly interposed hastily. "They kind of figure up there that you done 'em a favor."

"It would be a nice little stake," Brick mused. "It wouldn't cramp Arch any."

Thad knew that Brick had been worrying about taking money from Arch Heibert. Heibert was willing to give it to Brick; in fact, he insisted that he give Brick sufficient money for the proposed venture. But Brick did not like it that way.

"Now this is the way we kind of planned it," Silk said. "We can get horses an' a little outfit. We take our time gettin' up there. By the time we reach the north end of the country you'll be feelin' all right; then we'll look it over an' do the job, an' we'll all have money enough to do what we want. There's anyhow thirty thousand dollars in that payroll. We split it four ways."

"It sounds kind of good," Brick admitted.

"Then you'll go?" Silk's question was quick.

Brick looked at Silk and then at Curly, his eyes narrow. "Yeah," he said deliberately, "I'll go."

"Good!" Exultation was in Silk's voice. "How about you, kid?"

He was bitterly disappointed, seeing their plans go for nothing; bitterly distrustful of these two. But there was only one answer he could make.

"I side Brick," Thad said quietly. "All the way."

"An' that's good too," Curly said heartily. "We'll have a drink on it."

"Go down stairs an' bring a bottle, kid, will you?" Brick asked.

Without a word Thad went out and down the stairs. When he returned Arch Heibert was with him. Heibert brought the bottle and the glasses and set them on the table. "Celebration?" he asked.

"Kind of," Brick admitted. "Did the kid tell you?"

"He said you wanted a drink," Heibert answered.

Brick took the opened bottle and poured drinks into the small glasses. "I won't be needing that money from you, Arch," he said. "I'll make my own stake."

A worried look came into Heibert's eyes. "You goin' to pull a job?" he asked bluntly.

"Silk an' Curly an' the kid an' me," Brick answered.

"You don't need to, you know," Heibert said. "You know how welcome you are, Brick. You know—"

Brick had taken his drink. He grinned at Heibert. "I know I ain't goin' to sponge on you no more, Arch," he announced.

Heibert seemed about ready to push his point, then thought better of it. With a nod to the men about the table, he went out.

"We'll plan a little now," Brick announced. "Have you boys got any money?"

"I've got enough for what we need," Silk said. "All right, let's plan it."

THE talk went on, a discussion of horses, outfit, routes to follow, all the details of getting into the northern country. Thad took no part other than to listen. Brick gave information concerning the acquisition of horses, spoke about the men who could be trusted and those who could not, mentioned the things he believed essential. Silk and Curly added details. And Thad watched Silk and Curly with narrowed distrustful eyes.

"All right," Silk said finally. "Tomorrow night then. We'll have it all lined up. We'll be ready to go."

"An' so will we," Brick promised.

"Then we'll pull out an' start to work," Curly said. "The sooner the quicker. We'll have another drink and go." Once more the glasses were filled and once more the four men drank; then bidding Thad and Brick so long, Curly and Silk made their departure.

"What do you think of it, kid?" Brick asked when the others were gone.

Thad's answer came slowly. "I don't

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trust those two as far as I can throw an anvil; I'm not strong for it, Brick. Why did they want us?"

"Because"—the drinks and some other exultation had taken hold of Brick and made his eyes bright and his voice strong —"they know I've got the brains. They know they need me on a job like this. I thought I was done, kid. I thought I was finished when this arm went, but I guess I'm not. I guess there's some life in the old horse yet."

Thad was about to speak again and then checked himself. He could not cast doubts on Brick's enthusiasm. Brick was more like his old self than he had been since Thad rejoined him. Thad could not destroy that.

"Yeah, I guess that's it," he agreed.

It was later that night that Ellen came. Thad admitted her and she went straight to Brick and held him close. "Arch told me," she said. "Don't go, Brick. Don't do it. Don't go back into danger again. You can have everything Arch and I have. You know you can. You don't need—"

"Now honey!" Brick interrupted. "Now Ellen, this ain't goin' to be dangerous. This is just one last job to put the kid an' me in the clear an' take us out of the country."

"But it's stealing," Ellen said. "It's—"

"You don't even know what we're goin' to do," Brick said harshly. "Don't talk about stealin,' girl. Arch owns this place an' you got a nice house, an' all because I gave you a little start. You know where that start come from."

Ellen drew back from her brother. "I know," she said, a choke in her voice. "I've hated it, Brick. Please don't go."

"Why," Brick said, "I've promised. I told 'em I'd go. You wouldn't have me go back on that, would you?"

There was a finality in his voice that forbade further argument. Ellen looked at her brother as though she were seeing him for the first time, as though he were a stranger. "Then you will do it?" she said dully.

"I said I'd go," Brick stated.

The woman made a little hopeless gesture and turned to Thad. "You—" she began.

"The kid had nothin' to do with it," Brick interposed swiftly. "He's goin' with me, that's all."

Ellen's blue eyes were wide as she looked at Thad. "You're going too?" she asked.

Thad nodded.

"And you'll stay with Brick?"

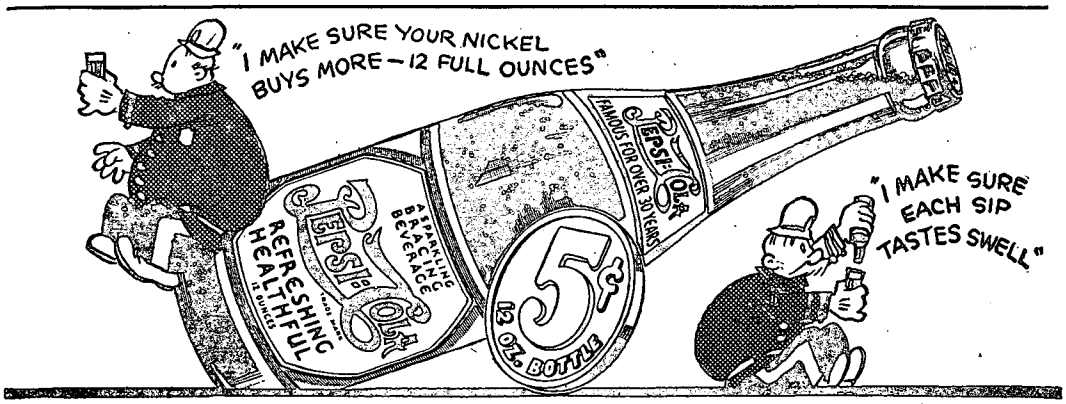
"I'll stay with him," Thad promised. "Yes ma'am."

The red haired woman walked over to Thad. Placing her hand on his arm, she said earnestly. "You'll look out for him? You will?"

"I'll be lookin' out for the kid, more likely," Brick scoffed.

Ellen paid no attention to her brother. She continued to look into Thad's eyes. "I'll look out for him," Thad promised.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK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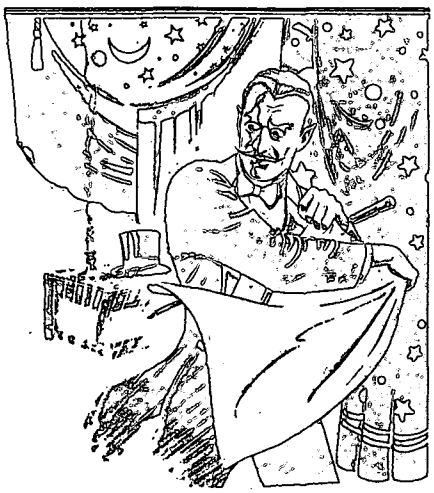
The Haji's Miracle

(An Argosy Oddity)

By GARNETT RADCLIFFE

Author of "The Fool of the Regiment," "The Rifle of Feroz Khan," etc.



NAY, *sahib,* don't tell me that story. Try it on the young men and perchance you will find one or two to believe such foolishness. But I have been *haji,* holy man, of this village for more than three score years, and I know that it is impossible for men to fly.

Why am I so certain? *Sahib,* the matter is very simple. Listen, and I will explain out of the wisdom Allah has given me. If I lift a stone in my hand—so—it returns quickly to the earth, does it not?

The *sahib* says he knows that—yes, but has the *sahib* ever pondered the reason?

I will tell the *sahib.* When I lift the stone all the air that is between it and the sky is lifted also. When, therefore, the stone is released it presses on it, causing it to return to earth. And as it is with that stone, so it is also with a man. No man can leave the earth by reason of the weight of air that lies between the top of his head and the sky.

Having that knowledge then, how am I going to believe the foolishness you were speaking about machines that flew higher and faster than birds carrying men in their insides? And those tales of men sitting in the sky and dropping bombs upon their enemies beneath!

Ho, ho! I'm sorry to have spoiled your joke, *sahib,* but I am an old man and I have acquired a vast store of knowledge during my life. Men cannot fly, and these tales of devil-birds called aeroplanes are all lies. I, the *haji* of Piran, have spoken . . .

The *sahib* asks have I then never seen a man flying? Assuredly I have. But he was not flying as the *sahib* means flying; he was seated in a box of silver cloth larger than this hut and he was borne aloft by ten evil djinns with the heads of snakes, who were invisible to all eyes save mine.

I could see them by reason of my piety, but to the other men of the village it seemed as if they were not there. Ho, ho! In their foolishness they thought it was some devil device sent by the British Raj to punish the village.

And when they heard the voices of the evil djinns, like swarming bees, they ran into the caves to hide.

Did I run too? Nay, *sahib.* A man of holiness such as mine has nought to fear from evil djinns! I went into a cave with the others—not to hide myself, but that I might pray undisturbed that the evil djinns would lose their footing and fall, thus causing the unbeliever they were carrying to descend into our hands.

That was why I went into the cave. There were a few who had got there before me and they were huddled in their foolish terror at the farthest end. When I had got past them I rebuked them for their fears and I told them to raise a barricade of

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stones at the mouth of the cave that I might pray in greater quietness.

And while I was speaking to them one of the djinns spat fire on the village, and there was a noise as if a mountain had fallen down, and two of our huts disappeared in a cloud of smoke.

THOSE others thought it was a bomb. They cast themselves on their faces, and in their terror they cursed me—yes, me who am the holy *haji* of Piran they cursed in their foolish fear, asking what manner of *haji* I was if I could not protect them from the bombs of the unbeliever!

I could easily have stopped it then and there, but it was necessary that the foolish people suffer somewhat, to prove their strength.

Like madmen they were in their fear. When a djinn spat a second time three or four of them laid hands upon me where I knelt at the farthermost end of the cave, praying with my face to the rock and my arms covering my head, and lifted me to my feet and pushed me out of the cave telling me to use my holiness to protect them.

Yes, *sahib,* they did that to me who am the most holy and the wisest *haji* in Asia.

Naturally I feared neither the djinns nor the unbeliever. I should gladly have walked in the open, save that within the cave, in its cool gloom, I could pray the more peacefully.

The *sahib* says he wonders I did not curse them so that they fell down dead. I did. But when I saw them falling dead, I quickly relented and gave them their life again. They were only young and foolish in their fear. . . .

The *sahib* says I am as merciful as I am wise and holy. There is truth in the mouth of the *sahib* . . . sometimes . . .

Ay, I brought them back to life and I even suffered them to push me outside the cave; for I was full of pity for their ignorance. Nor had I any fear of the evil djinns who were carrying the silver box in circles above out village and howling while they carried it.

Why should I for whom all the angels in Paradise are waiting eagerly with garlands of flowers and pitchers of milk and honey to reward me for my piety on this earth—why should I be afraid of death?

So I suffered those witless ones to whom I had restored their life to push me out of the cave, and I ran to another one.

Did I say I ran, *sahib?* Then I used the word in error. I went slowly without fear; but when I got to the cave there were other foolish ones who refused to let me enter. In their madness they drove me away with stones, telling me to prove my holiness by bringing down the unbeliever and delivering him into their hands.

WHAT did I do? I cursed them so that they were immediately transformed into tailless monkeys; and then of my great mercy I quickly relented and blessed them so that again they became men with no memory of what I had done.

And I went to a third cave—walking very slowly and praying aloud as I walked; but a stone moved under my foot so that I fell prone upon my face, hurting myself greatly in the fall.

A sign from Allah that because of my great piety and wisdom I was under his protection!

The flame bursts came more and more swiftly—rocks flew through the air and the people screamed aloud in their terror. But I did not stir or turn my face skyward. A great trembling seized me and I knew that the spirit was powerful within me.

I lay where I had fallen, not heeding the laughter of those foolish ones watching from the caves; and I covered my head with my arms that I might pray the better.

There was no fear in me for I knew that I had but to give the command, and the evil djinns would carry down the unbeliever, for they could not resist the will of such a holy *haji* as myself.

Presently I said the word still lying upon my face and the djinns ceased their howling and carried the unbeliever down into our midst as I had ordered.

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Sahib! Do you doubt my word? Beware lest I change you into a camel! By the beard of the Prophet I speak the truth. In this village there are three hundred men who will bear witness to what happened.

At my command the djinns brought down the unbeliever. They carried him only a few feet above the spot where I lay, howling no longer but whistling as the wind whistles when it blows through reeds . . .

Nay, *sahib,* it is the djinns I speak of. *I* was lying silent, praying with my arms around my head. And the djinns whistled as they passed above.

There was a stretch of level ground alongside the village. In obedience to my commands the djinns carried the silver box in which the unbeliever sat as it were in a half circle over the huts and then brought it gently down upon this level ground.

There were small wheels beneath the box, and they ran the thing along the level ground for a distance of perhaps a quarter of a *koss* until I ordered them to stop.

And when they had obeyed me I rose to my feet and spoke winged words to those witless cowards who came running and shouting from the caves where they had been hiding while I alone had remained outside to protect the village.

NAY, *sahib,* it was not in anger that I spoke to them. Where there is so much wisdom and holiness how can there be anger also?

I spoke to them after the manner of a father, promising them that if those who had pushed me outside the cave and those who had pelted me with stones were tied up and flogged and fined a half of their possessions I would spare the remainder of the village.

Was I not merciful?

Their reason had come back and they shouted that it would be done, praising my wisdom, my holiness and my mercy. They had seen the miracle I had worked on their behalf, and they knew that Allah had blessed them with a *haji* more holy than a saint.

Then we rushed across the plain to where the unbeliever still sat in the silver box, with only his head visible.

There was a tat-tat gun such as the unbelievers use on the side of the box, and when he saw our charge he ceased praying to the djinns for aid and fired at us. But I told the young men to have no fear, for in response to my prayers Allah would turn his bullets into drops of milk.

They went on while I stayed, kneeling behind a rock and protecting them with my prayers. Allah hearkened to me again and after a few had been killed or wounded, the gun ceased firing and they captured the unbeliever though he fought hard to escape.

They brought him to me with blood running down his face. He was a young sahib, very tall and very strong. And he showed no sign of fear until he looked upon my countenance, and heard my name and who I was from my own lips.

Then he trembled! Ho, ho! Unbelieving dog as he was tales of my holiness had reached even his ears. When I cried to him that I was the great *haji* of Piran equal of saints and the most holy man in Asia, he bowed his head and trembled like a tree smitten by a high wind.

Wah, that unbeliever knew his djinns could not protect him against the power of my holiness! He spoke our language well, and when I bade him confess he had been carried by evil djinns with snakes heads invisible to all eyes save mine, he answered loudly that it was so in very truth.

THEN I asked him had not an army of angels from Paradise come in answer to my prayers and compelled the djinns to set him down beside the village. He dare not lie in my presence. With his eyes fixed on mine he cried that that also was the truth.

Sahib, had he not been an unbeliever I could have felt sorry for the young man. I tell you his behavior was a lesson to

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certain base ones in our village how to treat a holy man with due respect.

He shook before me. When I raised my hand he fell flat upon his face. He shielded his eyes from my countenance as if it had been the sun.

Terror is a giver of wisdom. Such was his fear that presently his eyes were opened and he too saw the angels who were standing all around.

He shrank from them, waving his arms and calling loudly to me for deliverance. The others of the tribe marveled for in their ignorance they could not see the angels and it appeared to them as if he wrestled with empty air. But I have the eyes of holiness and I could see.

Sahib, I wish you had been present to behold that miracle. I am an old man and only once or twice have I performed a greater.

The white man walked backwards, straining at every step as if he were being pulled by ropes. As he went he howled to me for mercy. But I had no mercy for he was an unbelieving dog who deserved the punishment.

Back he went till he stood beside the silver box in which the djinns had carried him. Had I given a sign the angels would have released him. But I hardened my heart, and though he shouted as if he were being burned with fire, they made him climb upon the accursed thing and seat himself inside. He deserved no less.

None save me dared to approach. Standing a little way off lest my shadow might vex the angels I cursed him so that my words rose above his cries. And then Allah sent me the power and I worked yet another miracle.

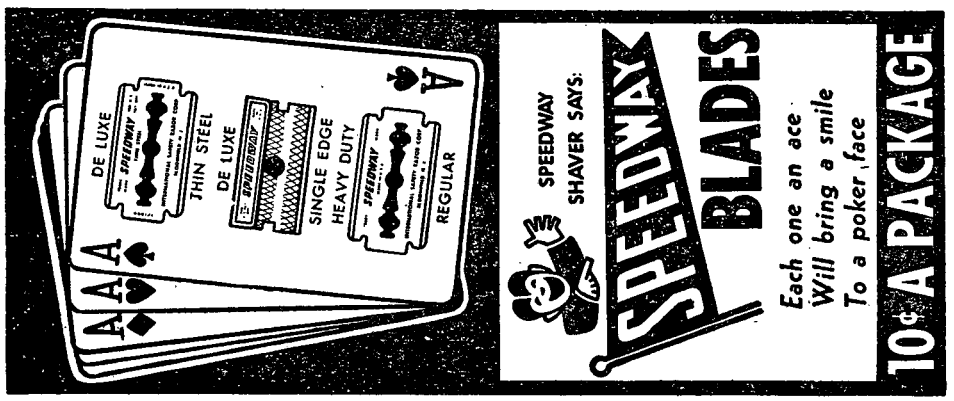
We heard a crackling sound as if lightning had smitten rocks asunder. Then the wings of the angels made as it were a halo of light upon the silver box; there was a great wind and the sound like the roaring of a thousand streams, and then the angels whirled the silver box across the plain faster than a bullet could fly.

When it had reached the edge of the plain I raised my arms and they carried it up and up till our eyes could follow it no longer.

That was the punishment I, the holy *haji* of Piran, have meted to the unbeliever. They are still carrying him higher and higher. When I give the order they will drop him upon a rock I have marked with the blood of a barren she-goat, and he will be dashed into more pieces than there are grains of sand in Asia.

As a proof, *sahib,* this is the very rock . . . Beware lest your shadow should defile its holiness . . . Return to this place in three or five years' time and you will see the unbeliever fall upon it.

I, the holy *haji* of Piran, have spoken, and the *sahib* is at liberty to depart.



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And suddenly the world breathed flame

Maker of Shadows

By JACK MANN

CHAPTER XXIII

MAKER OF DREAMS

A THING thought at Gees' inner self and wakened it. It used no words, but its form was: "We tried to warn you against the crimson liquid, but you were drowned in the scent, and would drink."

He thought in answer: "It is too late, now."

"She was bidden not to drink, but to keep watch. The lure of the liquid was too strong for her, and she drank. See her now!"

Gees saw her lying among the cushions of the divan, wonderful in sleep, with her outflung arm across his shoulder and her lips parted in a smile. Her alluring dark eyes were closed, and her breast rose and sank evenly. And in this dream he saw

The first installment of this five-part serial, herein concluded, was published in the Argosy for December 9

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They thought a laugh at him—even shadows could think laughter, being freed for a little hour from the driving of their master, who gave himself wholly for this time to the service of his Unnamed.

He thought a question: "Helen Aylener?" Then there was a flurry among the shadows that had thought these scenes into his consciousness. They crowded in on him, and he saw one clearly as a bearded, fierce, dirty face. A mere bodiless face, thrust close at him, thinking that he had thought something they were bidden keep from him. The face drove at him. He saw Gail nestle a little closer to his sleeping self, heard her contented, rest-filled sigh, and himself moved slightly.

His arm was numb with cramp. He moved it, trying to withdraw it from under her head without wakening her. The scent was strong in his nostrils: the things he had seen among the shadows raced, picture-clear, through and through his brain, and Gail asleep was dear, infinitely dear.

She started up, sat erect. She said: "But you should be asleep!"

He looked a laugh into her eyes. "I have wakened," he answered.

She leaned close toward him. The nearness of her was unbelieveable. Yesterday, he had not know that such fire and tenderness and utter abandonment could exist outside dreams. There was something he ought to remember, something the shadows wanted him to remember: they swayed round him, never completely within range of his opened eyes. Gail's eyes prevented them, her offered lips drove out thought of them, and the scent prevented reasoning, destroyed thought of yesterday or of tomorrow. Her arms around his neck were a garland.

"Gail . . . loveliness . . ." He spoke aloud. "You have not told me of yourself."

"What can I tell you? I am a shadow in your mind, a dream you hold close and love. All men seek a dream, and you have found it."

"No man ever found such a dream real before."

She passed a slender finger over one of his eyebrows. "I ruffled it, I smooth it," she explained, and smiled happily. "If I am a dream, you are reality. There is happiness and happiness, and you have given the greater of the two. All my life I shall remember. If I had accepted all the lives I have foregone, still I should have remembered."

"All the lives—?" He gazed into her eyes, questioningly.

"Nothing. Only, if there should be a tomorrow, remember it is because of you the lives I might have taken are foregone. If there should be a tomorrow! Do you remember that I trust you to set me free, save me from Gamel MacMorn when all doors are opened?" Her arms went round him as they sat among the cushions, and she stared at the door, not yet opened, while Gees looked into her hungry eyes.

"Trust, then. But I asked you, while we wait—tell me of yourself as you have not yet told." The language in which he must speak to her flowed as easily as his own, and he did not know that he spoke in it, so strong was the scent that drowned his reason.

"What shall I tell you?" Her dark eyes laughed at him, and for a moment she tightened the clasp of her arms while her lips lay on his own. About them the shadows swayed, never completely within the range of his sight, but stressing a warning that, because of the scent obscuring his reason, he would not heed.

"We are shadows in a shadow of a dream, you and I, Gail, but tell me of your wonderful self, of the dream that is you."

She said: "I am a shadow of that Unnamed who is possessed of all, yet whom none may possess. Yet I am not"—she drooped her head so that the words had a muffled sound as she clung to him—"not that one. For you know—you who hold me know!"

"I hold you, Gail, and I know," he told her.

"By the Kabiri, by Tanit, by the sevenfold essences that govern the outer dark-

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himself, too, from outside himself, one arm half hidden under Gail's dark hair, his eyes closed, his body inert.

The thing threw another thought into his self that saw these two asleep: "She did not keep watch."

Regret for Gail mixed in with an inexplicable triumph in that thought. Gees tried to sort out the two emotions, to understand the causes that evoked them, and the thing divined his thought. It put into his mind: "Because our master will punish her, and command us to trouble her dreams. And because we have triumphed over him, since she drank the liquid and so could not keep watch. It was willed that you alone should drink through her temptation, but the scent lured her, and she could not resist. She must pay a great price for this happiness."

"Then you are a shadow?" Gees thought the question at the thing he could not see nor hear, though he felt it as existing.

"We are all shadows. We tried to warn you, but the scent was too strong. Our master is too strong, and even now he prepares to gain new strength, and in the preparing relaxes his will from us. Else, we could not have won access to you."

It was no more than a dream, Gees knew, though it had a continuity beyond that of most dreams, a reasonableness in spite of its impossibility. One more effort, and he would waken. He could feel the warmth of Gail's arm, the weight of her head on his own arm. One more effort—but he could only look down and see those two bound in deepest sleep. Gail's smile told of utter, contented happiness, but he saw his own brows draw downward in a momentary frown, and his closed eyelids quivered, and stilled.

A shadow thought at him that he, one with them while that self on the divan slept, was out of time and out of distance. Nothing was either far or near, and presently nothing was real, for all things apart from existence itself were pictures on the great web of eternity in which time was woven as a pattern.

And because time was no more than a pattern on eternity, he was there out of time, with the shadows, out over the world. He could see Brachmornalachan and the altar open to the sky inside an inner circle no bigger than MacMorn's house. A red-armed man stood beside the black altar, and as others were dragged up one by one and laid on the altar his arm was splashed to a brighter red. When he looked up from his work and revealed his face, it was MacMorn's face. Then all the shadows among whom Gees knew himself one blotted out that piece of the pattern of time and were very much afraid.

"The master," they thought to Gees and to each other. "The master. If he sees us, he will drive this shadow who is not yet a shadow from among us, send him back to his self that sleeps. And a shadow which is not yet a shadow is a little rest from the fields of dead flowers and desire without hope."

HE THOUGHT a wish to see such fields, and looked on a waste of land swathed in grey gloom, dotted with tall stalks on which gray petals drooped, scentless, dead.

He knew the gloom as an intensity of hopeless longing for escape—and through the field, half-buried in it yet in no way arrested from its rush, a modern express train hurtled on shadowy rails among a flock of shadowy sheep, while among the sheep, an aeon or so before sheep ever found these pastures, a pair of beetle-browed, skin clad lovers—Cro-Magnons, perhaps—caressed each other. For all these things, though happening at different points in the pattern which was time, had happened in that one place in eternal space, and so were fixed there, each in its moment or hour.

Limit of fantasy! An express train rushing through the shadowy fields of asphodel! In the persisting fields shadows of men and women wandered hopelessly, calling to each other though none heeded the cries.

Gees thought at the shadows around him: "A mad world."

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ness—by the Unnamed herself, you alone know!" she whispered.

"That too, Gail, I know," he said.

SHE had sworn by Carthaginian gods. Was there in her a recurrent memory —was she one of the dark people who had come here in ships? Still the warning ticked in his brain, but it was clouded by the influence of the scent to indistinctness. Gail's cheek was soft against his own.

"Could I tell you more?" she asked caressingly.

"Your place and people," he said. "I know—only you and your name. There is still a little time." He glanced at his wrist-watch and at the closed door. Among the shadows he had seen the utter unreality of the world beyond that door—this, with Gail beside him, was real. He tried to thrust the vague warning out of his mind, to ignore it, since he could not understand it fully.

"My people," she said. "The Azilian people. They came to this shore in black ships, against their will. They set out toward the west, toward the country that the sea drowned, but when they set out they did not know the waters had covered it. A wind took and drove them to this shore, helpless—it was against their will, and the black ships were broken on the rocks. Only a few came alive to land."

Into his mind came Miss Brandon's voice, speaking into a receiver held at his ear: "Miss Aylener said, 'I saw the dark men land. They should have killed them all, then.'"

He asked: "The country was already peopled—the Azilians landed among another people?"

She said: "It is a picture in my mind, because the dark men were my fathers. They were few, but they ruled that other people and took sacrifices from among them when they set up the stones. So they made many shadows, and became kings and begot strong men.

"Gamel MacMorn is wholly of the dark people, as am I. Neither son nor daughter of my people mixed with the slaves we made, but my blood is pure. I lay my hair against your lips—test its softness! My hands that hold you—no slave blood is in them, or in me. I am of the dark people."

An incredibility, that through all the ages two families should not have intermingled with the race they had conquered. But it was all incredible, all a dream from which there must be an awakening. Somewhere outside, red buses ran, and express trains carried their freights—through palaeozoic swamps and the fields of asphodel!

Gail's soft voice carried on her story—and in the back of Gees' brain a puzzling half-consciousness told him that he knew the voice, had heard it somewhere, and would know it if only he could hear it in his own language. There was something he must do—but the scent was too strong.

She said: "Day by day the black altars of the Unnamed were red, and she gave my fathers power. They begot many children and grew very strong. They forgot the country of hot sun, because here were many slaves, and the Unnamed was hungry. So they ruled, and made shadows."

He thought aloud: "Not always."

"A new people brought iron," she said. "There was a first people of all, and the race of whom my fathers made slaves drove them underground. The people who live under the hills, and still Gamel MacMorn is kin to them, because in the very first days the dark people called on them for aid and they gave it, but only when a Morn allied with a woman from under the hills. So he is kin to that very first people, a race of shadows and dreams. But we are all shadows and dreams in the mind of the Unnamed—there is no reality apart from her purpose. I who might have had many lives am glad that for a little while she has given me strength of arms that hold me and the warm sweetness of lips kissing mine—for a little while, for a very little while!"

It was all a dream, and there must be an awakening. Green and silver held close in his arms—deep sea water under moon-

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light—and the velvet softness of her lips, their questing warmth . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

TIME OF THE NEW MOON

THE car came over the last rise, and Callum gripped hard on the wheel, for the wind struck strongly, and howled and roared at this thing which drove against it. In the saucerlike hollow before them, Brachmornalachan huddled, crouching under the assault of such a blast as struck it only once in a hundred years.

Margaret Aylener stiffened at sight of one of the four ash trees uptorn, a flat lying trunk and a mass of killed foliage that had broken down the wall which enclosed her home. Callum saw it too, and spoke above the roaring gale.

"When the wind dies, I'll plant a sapling there," he said.

Smitten firs lay flat on the hillsides, but for them she had no pity. The fallen mountain ash brought to her not pity, but fear. The stars in their courses fought for MacMorn, it seemed to her then.

The wind took a layer of peat turves from a stack beside the way, lifted and flung them, and one went trundling back out of sight, like a little devil running into freedom to work mischief. A ragged bundle of straw careened up the slope, wind-driven: the skeleton rafters of an unroofed cottage rose like bare bones above its walls, in the valley ahead.

"You say that clock is right, Callum?" Margaret Aylener asked.

"No more than five minutes either way, madam, and likely it's fast. A week today, it was, I set it back."

"Then there still is time. I want you to stop at the post office on the way home, and ask if any telegram has come. There may be some message from Miss Helen, and I want to know at once, if there is."

"Aye, madam. I'll stop and inquire."

The slope was with them, but the wind fought every yard of their advance. There were waves, real waves, driving across the tiny loch, and a line of white lather on the nearer, lee shore. To the right MacMorn's house squatted, a stony gray break on the peaty slope, low and far-spreading; while three gray stones, equidistant from the house, stabbed at the blue-gray sky.

Thirteen lives to each stone, she thought, and thirteen to each one that lay buried under the blackish, heather-dotted earth. There, in the circle of the stones, MacMorns had ruled while Ayleners contested their kingship: now, there were left only a dark man who made shadows, and a woman near the end of her life who would have given half her substance to end his power.

"If there is a telegram, Callum, Bathsheba can tell you its wording. And perhaps you may not have to go to MacMorn's, after all."

"Yes, madam."

The car dipped down and down. When Callum stopped outside the post office and opened the door to get out, the gale flung it back with a force that strained the holding strap, and he used both hands and some good part of his strength to shut it and keep out the wind that hurtled round the saloon and ruffled tendrils of Margaret Aylener's pale-gold hair.

The hands of the clock on the dash moved on: time fled, careless of her will to arrest its passing. Callum came out from the post office and she asked— "Was there a telegram from Miss Helen, or any message?"

"Nothing at all, madam," he answered, as he started the car on the last little part of its journey toward her home.

"Bathsheba told you there was nothing?" she insisted.

"IT WAS not Bathsheba told me anything, madam, but that girl Jennifer she has about the place. Jennifer said Bathsheba was not there, but went out last night and had not come back to sleep in her bed, which was made as it was yesterday when Jennifer went up with tea this morning."

"Bathsheba is missing?" She thought again that today was the day of new moon.

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Was Bathsheba Gralloch to disappear as had her sister Margaret, whom the years had made only a memory?

"Aye, madam, but doubtless she'll come back," Callum said grimly.

"Then if there had been a telegram from Miss Helen—" She broke off, knowing that the implication was enough for him.

"Nay, madam," he said, "Bathsheba's taught Jennifer, and she knows the instrument. She told me she called up only minutes ago, to make sure lest the wires should be down in this wind, and they were not. She's a gey clever lass, is yon Jennifer. I'll open the gate."

He drove through the gateway, and as they neared the shelter of her house the gale was a thunder overhead, updriven by the walls of unyielding stone. But away to the left lay the fallen mountain ash with the stone wall shattered under its branches, a trophy of the hurricane that roared into the land from the western sea. There was a salt tang in the air, a vestige of the hurtling waters over which this fury of wind had been conceived and born.

"Callum?" She spoke as he turned the car to draw up before the doorway. "Elizabeth and Ettie can see to the trunks and carry them in, without your help, and you can leave the car here. It will come to no harm—unless this wind throws the house down on it. I want you to go straight to MacMorn's."

"Madam—" It was not a dissent from her wish, but a question for knowledge to equip him for his errand. "You're certain she's there?"

"If there were any certainty at all, Callum, she would not have gone," she answered. "I learned in London—he met her while we were abroad, and that must have been the beginning of it. Mr. Kyrle and Mr. Green have gone there, you tell me, but they have not found her—if they had, she would have seen the car and been out to welcome me. Wait, though; I will make sure."

She entered the house. Callum sat at his wheel, waiting until she appeared again and, looking in on him, shook her head.

She said: "They have not come back, Callum, and there is no news of her. I want you to go there, now."

He said, looking at the clock on the dash: "It is very near the time of new moon."

"Go now, Callum—wait for nothing. You may yet be in time. Go now, I tell you!"

He got out of the car.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FALLEN STONE

NO MATTER how strenuously Gees might try to disregard it, there was a monition in his brain, a warning which the scent would not let him perceive fully. MacMorn had contrived the scent to block out that warning: MacMorn had designed all this enchantment . . .

Had MacMorn made and sent—Gail?

But that was a monstrous impossibility, a thing too fantastic for weaving into this pattern of a dream. Gail was a reality. The faint pressure of her breath stirred his hair. A miracle of undreamed loveliness, she leaned close to him, and her eyes were dark lakes of questing beauty.

Beyond their range the warning shadows ever eluded his vision, free for this hour to commune with none who was not yet a shadow, but not free to tell all they knew. Else, why had they driven him back to Gail when he had questioned as to what had become of Helen Aylener?

Helen Aylener? Who was Helen Aylener?

Gail drew him down among the cushions of the divan, and leaned over him. She said, very softly, "Sleep. Sleep and forget all things." And her fingers went down and down over his face, while all her will impelled him to sleep. Enough of sanity remained for him to realize that she was trying to induce a hypnotic sleep, and he closed his eyes to escape the influence, for the wristwatch had told him that the time of opening doors was very near.

"Sleep, and forget all things. Go down

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so deeply into sleep that you cannot even hear my voice. Sleep, go down into sleep."

For a little while her fingers passed down his face, and he knew again what the shadows had tried to warn him. At the very time for which she had asked him to save her from MacMorn, she tried to render him powerless!

The caressing fingers ceased their touch on him, and he lay with closed eyes, breathing evenly. She asked: "Can you hear my voice?"

Lying back among the cushions, he made no reply. The scent still enveloped him, but he resisted its drugging sweetness as he had resisted her will to spell him to sleep.

He felt her draw away from him, heard the faint rustle of movement as she rose from the divan, and her deep sigh of satisfaction. Again he heard the mouse-scratching sound in the paneling, and opened his eyes. Gail stood with her back to him, looking into the dark corridor through which she had come with him from the green and silver room, and as he lay he could hear the humming of the wind outside; and the terrified "Maa-aa-a!" of a goat, and this abruptly silenced. He could guess the reason for the silence.

The sound had come from the middle of the house, where the black altar in its circle lay open to the sky.

With the opening of the door air eddied into the room, and the greenish haze of the scent became swaying vapor, thinning, becoming less potent. He had an illusion—it could be only illusion, surely—that Gail's figure dimmed, even that its outline changed. She reached into the corridor to close the door, and, knowing that she would turn to face into the room again, Gees closed his eyes.

HE HEARD the rustle of her approach. It came into his mind that, since she knew the secret of these doors, she and he might have gone out by way of the visible door leading to the outer corridor, out from the house and beyond MacMorn's reach, at any time she chose.

The shadows had said that she had been forbidden to drink of the crimson fluid, and so had failed of her purpose. Did she think to retrieve that purpose by hypotising him to sleep through the time of opened doors?

Though he knew her now as allied with MacMorn, the sense of her nearness was still a wonder of expectation, for the dream they two had dreamed lingered in his mind. He could never forget it; he wanted now to reach up and draw her close to him again, hold all the shining, yielding, tender miracle of her.

He had been duped so easily. She must have been filled with inward laughter at the blind readiness with which he had accepted her for what she seemed. Were her dark eyes mocking him now as she looked down, bent over him, so closely that he could feel the warmth of her breath on his face?

But then he felt her lips brush against his own, and as she drew back he could hear the hurried unevenness of her breath. Then she must have drawn back, for he was no longer conscious of her nearness. She was standing by the divan, he guessed looking down, and he dared not open his eyes. She whispered, caressingly: "Dear man! Dear man!"

Whispered in English! Then she, too, regretted that the dream had ended.

He heard her faint, startled exclamation, and the clang of opening doors that must be thrown wide when the Unnamed descended along the path of the shadows.

A wind rushed through the room, sweeping away the last vestiges of the scent and bringing a fresh tang as of the sea. He started up on the divan, and at his movement, Gail shrieked aloud and, turning, fled. The silence gave place to clamor of the gale and a faint sound of voices. There was no more enchantment. Reality had destroyed the glamor in which he had been bound—and Gail had gone!

HE THRUST himself up from the divan with his hands, and ran toward the door, snatching up his raincoat

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as he passed the place where he had thrown it—how many ages ago? Out into the corridor, in time to catch a glimpse of green and silver as Gail fled from the house. He gained the outer, open doorway, and saw her running down the slope toward the scribed monolith, a figure already shadowy in wreathing swirls of fog that drove before the mighty wind.

He ran, neared her fleeing figure, and shouted: "Gail, Gail!" No longer a green and silver figure, and the light slenderness he had held in his arms appeared to run heavily, almost clumsily. And now it was no illusion that other lines mixed in with those of the shape he knew: to his sight she changed as she ran.

A man fighting his way through the hurricane loomed before her—for a few moments she paused, and Gees halted to get out his automatic pistol, in case the man should be MacMorn.

But he heard Callum call to her over the wind: "What are you—?" and Gail interrupting in little less than a scream: "Dinna fret yersel'. 'T'is my ain business!" before she ran past the man, and grew shadowy in the driving mist, a heavy, blundering figure—Gail!

Bathsheba Gralloch's voice! Word for word, Bathsheba Gralloch's reply to Kyrle, when he had run after her outside the gate of the Rowans the night before! Gail of the green and silver room, of the enchantment MacMorn had made, was Bathsheba Gralloch of reality.

A sick rage possessed Gees. If MacMorn had faced him in that moment, he would have shot him dead. If, even when the dream had been most real, she had spoken one sentence in English, he would have recognized the voice, but MacMorn had guarded against that chance. Now, clear of the house and its spells, Gees could not remember so much as a phrase of the dark man's language; it had served MacMorn's purpose, and was swept from his mind as if he had never spoken it.

He faced Callum. "Who was that—the woman who passed you?" he asked.

"That? The woman from the post office." Callum took a long breath as he recovered his wind after the struggle up the slope. "Bathsheba Gralloch. I've always tried to make Miss Aylener understand she's mixed in with MacMorn's black magic, but she would never credit it."

They went back toward the house together. Gees wound his raincoat round his arm, for it flapped in the driving wind. Callum asked: "Miss Helen?" and Gees looked at his wristwatch.

"I don't know," he said, "but there is still a quarter of an hour. Somewhere, I believe, in that damned house of sorceries, but I don't know. MacMorn separated me from Kyrle and jailed me in a room."

"But all doors had to be opened," Callum commented. "I knew it."

The mist drove away, thinned, and the squat house stood stark before them. Hours of daylight remained to reveal it—a gray, sullen light, and the wind roared hammering at the house. MacMorn's thorn tree tossed and bent in the gusts.

"Callum"—Gees bent close to him—"the woman from the post office. What do you know of her—do you know what she was like when she was younger?"

"Eh, what does it matter now?" Callum asked in reply. "A dark tall slip of a thing when I was a child, and Miss Aylener petted her, made much of her. Gave her clothes—there was a green silk frock I remember. But the sister disappeared—MacMorn took her, and may Hell take him!—and after that this one never came near The Rowans. Look!"

He pointed up at a window almost directly over the front door of the house.

THEY saw Kyrle standing, gazing out to the wind-whirled tatters of thinning mist, ignoring them completely. Callum shouted at him, but he stood still, unheeding both the shout and their beckoning hands. Quite still, staring out with as little animation as if he were a corpse propped at the window.

"He's in hypnosis," Gees said. "We must go up and get him out."

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"If we can wake him, he may give us news of Miss Helen." Callum made to enter the house as he spoke, and Gees went with him. But the black clad, black-haired serving man, whom Gees had seen before, turned from looking along the corridor to bar their way.

"Get aside, you!" Callum said sharply. "We're coming in."

"Ye'll no' come in!" He stood in the doorway, a heavily-built, strong figure of a man, and bared his teeth uglily. Gees drew his automatic pistol from his pocket, and leveled it at the man's chest.

"Stand aside!" he shouted.

Instead, the man leaped at Callum with a snarl, and the two of them went down in the doorway. Callum was undermost, and Gees stepped forward, reversing the pistol. He waited his chance, and rapped on the man's temple with the butt end of the weapon. He rolled aside senseless as Callum heaved out from under him and got up, with a thin stream of blood running down from teeth-marks in his chin.

"Bit me," he gasped out. For a few seconds he leaned against the lintel of the door, and his breath whistled through his teeth. Gees passed him and looked along the corridor for a staircase which would take them up to Kyrle, but could see none. He had already been past the door of the room in which he had been trapped by MacMorn and held inert by Gail, and knew no visible staircase existed that way. Somewhere at the other end of the house—

"Do you feel fit to face things?" he asked.

Callum stepped into the corridor beside him. "Quite—it was only a minute's struggle." He looked down at the crumpled figure, and Gees, dragging it aside out of the doorway, remembered the automatic pistol Kyrle had put down at a MacMorn's bidding. It was no longer there.

"We'll go up," he said. "This way—it must be this way."

He led along the corridor, and they came to the wide-flung door of the green and silver room. Gees looked in for a moment and saw two dusty old couches and what might have been a couple of roughly-made milking stools, and the very color of the upholstery on the couches had faded to brownish-gray.

Of all the green and silver sensuousness in which he had seen Gail stand, no trace was left. Callum's words came back into his mind: "A tall dark slip of a thing when I was a child—" and Callum had remembered a green silk frock. MacMorn had spelled it all back and the room too as setting for her; to what she had been he had added such beauty as the fairy folk contrive for a night, to turn to rags and dust with the coming of dawn.

Illusion—all illusion!

FOR just the second of realization Gees looked into the room, and then he led the way along the corridor, round the corner and toward the back of the house. A little way along they came to an unlighted stairway, and went up, feeling a way by the wall to come into another corridor, or running from side to side of the house, dividing the front and back rooms of the first floor.

They hurried, for the minutes were racing away from them now, and came to the open door of the room in which Kyrle stood as they had seen him from outside, a still figure at the window, quite heedless of the noise they made in entering.

"Kyrle!" Gees shouted at him. "Wake up, man!"

He did not move. Gees went to him and, grasping him by the shoulder, shook him and turned him round. He moved his feet just so much as kept him balanced on them, and his wide eyes stared sightlessly past them, through them. Except that his heart beat and his flesh was warm, he was lifeless, a body in which the spirit was asleep.

"We must get him outside," Gees said. "Little chance of getting any news of Helen out of him. Come on, Kyrle."

He pulled at a limp arm, and Kyrle moved with slow, thudding steps as far as

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the door. But there, in a way, he came to life. MacMorn had bidden him stay in the room, and he would not leave it.

With a hand thrust out to each side to hold him back, he resisted stubbornly, strong enough in his hypnosis to thwart them both. Until, realizing how little time remained in which to find and save Helen Aylener, Gees drew back to give himself room, and with all his weight behind the blow struck Kyrle in the solar plexus and got an arm round the limp, senseless figure.

"He'll thank me for that, yet, if he remembers it," he said. "Give me a hand, Callum. I'll carry him out, and then you can get him away somehow while I go looking for Miss Helen. Once outside this cursed circle, I believe he'd wake up."

He stooped, and between them they got Kyrle across his shoulder. Then they went out from the room, Callum following down the dark stairway and to the other door.

Outside, the hurricane appeared to be lessening, though still it roared and beat at the house, and all the hurrying mist had driven eastward and left gray clarity over the valley. Gees dumped his burden on the ground and saw that the pillar scribed with Koré's symbol had fallen.

For centuries beyond telling it had stood, but now it was only a line along the surface of the earth. Was its fall a token that MacMorn's power was failing?

"And now—Miss Helen?" Callum asked.

"I'll look for her," Gees answered. "If you leave him to wake up here, he'll only go back into that room—you've got to get him beyond the limit of the circle, somehow, outside MacMorn's domination. I believe you'd do it if you got him past that stone down there."

He stepped quickly inside the doorway as MacMorn's man stirred and groaned, and, taking his pistol out from his pocket again, Gees dealt the man a second heavy blow.

"That should keep you quiet," Gees grunted. "All right, Callum—look after Mr. Kyrle and get him away. Come back and look for me if he wakes in his right sense. I'll find Miss Helen if she's here."

He turned back into the house as Callum began half-lifting, half-dragging Kyrle's limp body down the slope toward the fallen stone.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BLACK ALTAR

THEY had missed MacMorn only by minutes. He entered the room from which Gail had fled and Gees had followed her, a few seconds after they had gone; he was searching for her, since he had need of a woman's aid. Then he sought her in the dusty room in which he had made illusion for Gees, not knowing that she was then running away from the house.

No sign of her, no time to find her.

MacMorn went up the staircase and entered a room at the back where Helen Aylener, blank in hypnosis as was Kyrle, sat still on a bed. Bathsheba should have been here with the girl, should have prepared her, and now there was so little time, so terribly little time. He touched the girl's forehead with his fingertips.

"Waken to me, Helen," he bade. "Waken, but only to me."

In a way she became alive; she was an automaton, capable of doing his bidding, and no more. He said: "Stand up," to test her response, and she stood obediently, completely subject to him.

He held up a leather gag that he carried. "Open your mouth," he bade, and again she obeyed, uninterestedly.

He fitted the gag between her teeth, not ungently, and strapped it behind her head, because in the limit of swift agony she must endure on the black altar she must not be able to cry out. He said: "Undress—take off all your clothes," and while she obeyed that command too he took two black swathings that hung over the end of the bed.

In one he wrapped himself, a covering that reached from his head to his feet, and when she stood naked he draped the other robe over her, a thick black woollen fabric

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which left exposed only her bare feet and ankles, her face and untidy, pale gold hair.

Then he grasped her arm through the robe, and led her out and down. Had he been a minute later, Gees and Kyrle would have met him as they went up to where Kyrle stood helpless.

He took her along the corridor which ran midway of the house at ground level, giving access from either side to the circle and the black altar stone. By one end of the stone the man Partha stood, naked, his arms folded on his hairy chest and his shaggy black head bent forward—he was acolyte to the black-robed priest of ancient evil who led the gagged sacrifice to the altar, and he neither moved nor looked up as the two advanced, while the great wind roared overhead and blue-gray masses of cloud raced across the sky.

Between the altar and the top of the circle that walled it in a darkness slowly gathered as MacMorn had seen it gather —how many times?

Down the shallow channel between the wall and the black stone, a line of thin fluid trickled to ooze through a wire gauze that had been set up. On the other side of the gauze, where the channel in the stone encircled the black altar rising above it, the fluid was alight with a wavering, bluish flame that gave off flecks of oily black smut. Like the covering of a Davy lamp, the wire gauze prevented the fluid from taking fire before it passed into the channel cut round the altar stone. There was a resinous smell; the fluid may have been turpentine, or some similar spiritous distillation.

The little blue flames wavered and flickered, ringing in the black stone, and Partha stood as if he too were made of stone, his gaze directed down at the flame.

MacMORN stripped the black robe off the girl and lifted her in his hold. He stepped over the flame and laid her on the black stone, her pale gold hair just touching its edges near where Partha stood.

He took her hands, one after the other, and drew her arms down straight beside her, and she made no more resistance than a doll. Then MacMorn stepped back across the flame and, gazing upward, lifted his arms in silent invocation, his black robe falling back like a curtain hung behind him.

The darkness over the altar grew denser. Black smut from the wavering flame was lifted up into it, and the flames grew tall and thin and steady, standing up like bluish, transparent candles, ringing in the black altar and the white, still girl laid on it. And now the darkness began to take shape—MacMorn stood rigid, his arms upraised, and Partha's head drooped still lower on his folded arms.

Above them grew the semblance of a giant figure with enormous, shadowy arms and hands of which the fingers were taloned like those of a vast beast, and with the face of a woman who knew all evil, and for whom all evil was not enough.

Slowly, second by second, this semblance sucked up form and substance from the flames; slowly, second by second, it grew more tangible, and descended, a forming horror of unimaginable cruelty and lust and fear, bearing down toward the altar and the naked girl laid there, while round and round the limits of the circle shadows, cold and devoid of all emotion except that of longing for release from their dreary bondage, waited and watched this making of another shadow which presently would be one among them.

They crowded, far off and still, while the vaster shadow accreted substance and strength from the flames, and descended—

All this, through seconds of frozen, helpless horror, Gees saw, and knew that if he had overcome MacMorn it was only by a minute. Because he would not kill the black-robed man or devil without warning, he lifted the pistol in his hand and fired a shot at the wall, just over the place from which the fluid ran down to feed the fire about the black altar.

With the shot MacMorn's arms dropped

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as if the bullet had struck him, and the awful shape of the Unnamed whipped away like a veil and was gone, while Partha looked up, his teeth showing over his shaggy beard—

And a spurting shaft of fluid from the wall struck MacMorn between the shoulders, a thin cascade curving out from the hole Gees' bullet had pierced in the tank concealed high up in the circle of stone.

MacMorn faced the source of the flow, faced about again, bewildered, and as Gees stepped out from the gloom of the corridor along which he had advanced, MacMorn almost leaped toward him, guessing his intent to take Helen off the altar.

The man's black eyes flamed in fury, and he made to pass the end of the altar —a little blue flame touched the edge of his spirit-sodden black robe, and he himself became a pillar of spouting flame, a tortured beast that ran hither and thither while Gees stood aghast at the sight and Partha fled into a corridor and vanished.

Then, fighting with his hands against the fire that perhaps gave him a foretaste of his Hell, screaming in utter agony, MacMorn slipped and fell into the lake of fire that mounted upward, ever upward, fed by the stream from the bullet hole. There, drowned in fire, breathing fire, he was no more than a thing that writhed for a very little while and was still, while the shadows that had watched and waited fled, vanished. Release had come to them, and they would haunt this place of their making no more, for MacMorn, last of the men who had made them, was dead.

ONE side of the black stone was still beyond the lake of flame in which MacMorn's body shriveled and roasted. As, pocketing his pistol, Gees reached over from that side and wrapped the raincoat round Helen's body, and then lifted her, he felt the heat of the increasing furnace scorch his eyes.

He dragged her to the side of the stone at which he stood, lifted her in his arms, and ran into the corridor, round to the front, and out from the house.

There he stopped to remove the gag MacMorn had placed in her mouth, and to clothe her more completely in the raincoat. Lifting her, he went off down the slope toward the loch—toward the fallen stone, over which two figures that he recognized as Kyrle and Callum stood, looking down until he was quite near them.

Then Kyrle, looking up and seeing what he carried, would have run toward him, But Callum held the younger man back, gripping his shoulder with both hands to arrest him.

"Nay, you don't go inside the line of the stones!" he bade.

Outside that line, past the end of the fallen pillar, Gees stopped, still holding Helen close to him, and looked down as Callum pointed. The skyward end of the pillar, rushing down, had struck Bathsheba Gralloch as she fled, crushing her bones, mangling her body, but leaving her face and head untouched.

The stone was splashed with her blood; death had struck her so suddenly that her unmarked face, turned upward to the sky, revealed only surprise, and her parted lips almost smiled.

"I tried to shut her eyes," Callum said. "They opened again."

"Someone—we must get spades and dig her out," Gees said. "The stone is too heavy for us to lift or lever it off her."

"Look—look there!" Callum pointed at MacMorn's house.

A black shaft of smoke fled away from it, drove eastward on the last of the great gale. Where the smoke poured out from the house, its underside was streaked with yellow and blue as the fed flame roared up. For a second or less Gees glanced at it, almost indifferently.

"MacMorn's roasting in it," he said. "I wish he were still alive to feel the roasting."

He glanced at Kyrle and saw him white and sick-looking, half dazed as yet. He looked down again at the blood-splashed stone and Bathsheba Gralloch's dead face beside it.

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In some way death canceled out the ugly bitterness of his wakening from illusion. This crushed and shattered corpse had once been a dark, tall slip of a thing in a green silk frock—green shot with silver, perhaps—and her eyes that had hardened as her face had coarsened were once pools of tender darkness—Gail's eyes.

Somewhere on the pattern in the web of eternity that is called time Gail, not Bathsheba Gralloch, was fixed, in green and silver, and cold reason was extinguished in a scent that was like nothing on earth—MacMorn's enchantment! MacMorn had made it all!

Helen Aylener stirred in his hold. "My tongue is horribly sore," she muttered. Then, struggling: "Put me down! Put me down!"

"I can't put you down," Gees answered. "You've got nothing on but my coat, no shoes nor anything. These heather stalks would cut your feet to pieces. I've got to carry you back home."

She relaxed to limpness, and closed her eyes. Callum moved nearer and, peering at her face, reached out a forefinger and pulled down one of her lower eyelids.

"Better get her back as soon as you can, Mr. Green," he urged. "I don't altogether like the look of her."

THE wind was fast dying away, now. Behind them as they went toward The Rowans MacMorn's house spouted fire at every window. Gees thought for a moment and little more of the man he had stunned and left just inside, but was quite indifferent as to what might happen to such a one. He had been one of MacMorn's hellish crew, and if he were burned as was MacMorn the world would be better for the loss of him.

Silent, unquestioning, his face pasty-white, Kyrle walked with them toward The Rowans. Helen stirred no more, but lay in Gees' hold as if she slept. They reached the gate and Callum opened it; Gees saw the fallen mountain ash, and made no comment. He was reminded, by the sight of the stricken tree, of the fallen monolith, of Bathsheba Gralloch's still face and dark eyes, and dead lips that half-smiled.

They went along to the house, and just within the opened door Elizabeth took Helen in her strong arms and carried her as easily as if she were but a child.

A distant, thunderous crash made Gees face about. The roof of MacMorn's house had fallen in, and all the place was a mass of spouting, crackling flame and lines of black smoke, from which little patches of blazing wood or fabric shot up and fled eastward on the wind.

Gees remembered the black wood on the inner side of the corridor, the paneling of the rooms—a dusty, unused room that to his sight had gleamed as a green and silver casket for an unreality of MacMorn's conjuring.

Dots showed on the hillside, people of Brachmornalachan going to view the fire. Anohter crash, as inside some part of a floor or wall collapsed, and another mad medley of sparks and flaming splinters rose skyward and curved in the wind to fall. The thorn tree was shriveling, its dried, heated branches actually beginning to break into flame.

Gees drew back, and, since Callum and Kyrle and Margaret Aylener had left him alone in the entrance hall, he closed the door.

CHAPTER XXVII

ROSEMARY

STANDING before the drawing room window of The Rowans, Gees heard the outer door close, and presently a big Daimler went down the drive and, turning to pass through the village, rocked and swayed on its journey away from Brachmornalachan.

Occasionally he glanced at it, ascending the long slope toward roads, radio sets, reinforced concrete buildings, and civilization; for the most part his gaze was directed across the little loch and toward the heap of tumbled ruin among which, after a week of cooling, even now some

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blocks of stone still kept their warmth.

Neither he nor Callum had said anything when the half-calcined bones that the doorway had sheltered from falling wreckage were identified as those of MacMorn; telling the identity of the bones would not have altered anything.

When the black altar had lain open to the sky, collapsing masonry had shattered the oblong slab to scorched fragments. And the fire and stone that between them had heated and shattered it had ground his bones to powder, so that no more trace remained of him than of the bodiless shadows that had driven along his mists, vainly seeking release from his government. He who had upheld that state had ceased his being; the state too had ceased, since no priest of dark evil, master of the old dark worship, remained to gather fresh victims as his offerings to the Unnamed.

All that he had fathered and upheld had gone; there remained nothing except a spread heap of scorched and broken stones among feathery, whitish ash, the whole enclosed in an oblong of useless walls.

Gees faced away from the window as Margaret Aylener entered the room.

She said, "Well, the doctor has gone. He merely confirms all that Callum said. She might get well, if she wished, though pernicious anaemia is very dangerous. I believe you know Callum took his degrees and is a fully qualified physician."

"I do know it," he answered. "So—does Kyrle know?"

"Not what this specialist has said, of course, but he knew what Callum said, when he went away yesterday. He had to go. Oh, I know he had to go! Only for three days he said, but—"

Gees made no comment. Except that he had saved the girl from MacMorn's fearsome deity, he felt that he had no part in this following tragedy—for tragedy it was, and Margaret Aylener knew it as one. She had brought this specialist from Glasgow, to no purpose but that of confirming Callum's judgment. Helen Aylener alone could save Helen Aylener, and she would not.

"She would like to see you," Margaret Aylener said. "She asked me before the specialist arrived, and I told her, after he had gone. If you would not mind—you have been very kind to us, and I feel sorry you must go back tomorrow. Until Ian comes back, I shall be alone."

"But I must go," he told her. "Of course I'll go and talk to your niece, if she wishes it. But first, I thought I'd like to ask you about the woman—Bathsheba Gralloch, her name was. The woman from the post office who was found dead under the fallen dolmen."

SHE smiled, a very little. "I have never heard that word used in connection with them before, in this part of the world," she said. "But they are dolmens, of course, no less here than in Brittany. What was it you wanted to ask about Bathsheba?"

"You—well, made a *protegée* of her, I believe?" he suggested.

"I don't know who told you," she said. "It would be an exaggeration to say I went so far. As a young girl Bathsheba was very lovely, and I thought she was meant for better things than Brachmornalachan."

"And she was like what?" he asked.

"How do you mean—like what in what way?"

"In appearance."

"At her best, of almost unearthly loveliness," she said slowly. "Sometimes no more than a tall, dark girl, rather striking in appearance. I thought for a time she might have made something better of herself than is possible in a place like this, and gave her clothes, tried to encourage her. I was young and enthusiastic, then." She smiled a little at the recollection. "But Bathsheba was stubborn and careless of herself, not willing to learn, and after her sister disappeared she seemed to avoid me, so I gave her up. I know she might have married, more than once, but preferred to remain single. And now, by the way she died, it seems that after all she was connected with MacMorn."

"I suppose her being in that place just

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when the dolmen fell must count as a coincidence," he observed, "but to me it appears that MacMorn was afraid of her after she failed him, and willed her death."

"I wonder how much you know, Mr. Green?" She gazed at him questioningly. He had told her very little of what had happened.

"Not much," he answered. "I can believe and assume and guess, but know—all the proof that might establish knowledge is there on the far side of the loch, wrecked and hidden forever among that heap of stone. One thing, though, I do know.

"When you first sent for me, it was already too late. Unless you had handcuffed your niece to me as soon as she wakened in the morning and only released her to lock her into safety at night, you could not have kept her from MacMorn. You were right in saying that he could call her back to him from any place on earth, and he called before she could marry Kyrle and so get some measure of protection."

"Yes," she said. "He was very strong. I only realized how strong his hold on her might be after she had disappeared." She glanced at the watch on her wrist. "I think it is time, now, if you don't mind seeing her."

"I shall be very pleased," he assented.

She took him up to Helen's room, where the girl lay in bed, and after a word or two left him there. He seated himself beside the bed, and, to break an awkward silence, lied cheerfully: "I understand the specialist was quite pleased with you."

She did not seem impressed.

"Aunt Madge tells me you are going away tomorrow," she said. "I wanted to ask you some things. Will you tell me the truth, Mr. Gees?"

Gees spoke carefully.

He said: "As far as I can, Helen," and saw her as far different from the girl who, with Kyrle, had bent over the engine of the sports car. She had been so vitally alive, then. Now, there was a slow distinctness in her speech that told of utter lack of vitality.

FOR awhile she lay still, gazing up at the ceiling and frowning as if in an effort at collecting her thoughts. Then she turned her gaze toward him again and said: "I saw Gamel MacMorn take fire and burn."

"You mean—you were conscious then?" he asked.

"No. If you don't understand this, I can't explain it. I don't understand it myself. But—you knew there were shadows, didn't you? You saw them, I mean, the shadows he had made?"

"I know, and I saw them."

"Then—when he began to burn—I was like them," she said. "I can't explain it. But I saw him, and myself lying there, and you—all of it. I was with them, with many shadows. I saw very many things, not things of today, but old happenings, mixed in with what was happening then. And Callum dragging Twister away, and the pillar falling on Bathsheba—it was thrown on her, in that sight of mine, and she was held there while it fell. Great black arms and hands—"

For awhile she closed her eyes, and Gees waited. Then she gazed at him again and said: "Nobody has told me anything of what happened there since you brought me back—Callum told me you brought me back, nothing else. I want you to tell me the truth. *Did* Gamel MacMorn take fire and burn, and did I lie naked on a black stone there?"

He answered unhesitatingly: "Yes, Helen."

She smiled. "I felt sure I could get the truth from you. Something else I wanted to ask you, but you can only tell me what you believe about it, I know. About—about being one with the shadows. Is it—do you think that is what happens after death? Do we become no more than helpless shadows in the cold, just eyes that look back to life and the world, seeing, and nothing else?"

"I don't see that as the purpose or end of life, Helen," he answered gently. "Those shadows MacMorn and others who held his belief made—they were only parts of

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existences, just as what saw him take fire and burn was only a part of you—the rest of you, the human life of you, was lying on the stone, held there by MacMorn's will. Now he is dead, there are no more of his shadows. Say that the vital force in man is made up of both soul and spirit—can you follow that, though?"

"I'm not quite a child, Gees." Some of her complete, vital self flashed in the reply.

"No, not quite," he agreed. "Well, say that there are both soul and spirit, and that MacMorn or whatever he served managed to trap away either of those two to use, and left the other helpless in the cold, as you put it. As soon as he is destroyed, the shadow is released and rejoins the rest that made up an individual self—there are no more shadows of his making. His death released them all."

"You honestly believe that?" she asked.

"You asked for truth—I'm giving it you as I see it."

"But—he took something of me. Some part of my life that I can't get back, and I know—"

"What?" he asked, after waiting for her to end it.

"I know—well, say this is the last time I shall see you."

"Helen, that's fool talk," he said gravely. "Some part of the hypnosis he used on you is still at the back of your consciousness. You've got to get rid of it, got to get up over it and be yourself again."

"It's no use, Mr. Gees." She smiled at him. "Twister knows—I told him and he understood, because MacMorn had stolen some part of him, too. No, it's no use. There's some part of me that I shall get back in the end—only in the end. I've got to go and find it, and so—and so—since you're going tomorrow I know I shall not see you again."

"This is absolute foolishness, Helen," he said gravely. "What it means is that your will is preventing you from getting well. There's Kyrle, remember—all life waiting for you."

"Say it is my will, if you like," she insisted. "My will to completeness. I must go and find—I don't know what I must find, but it is a part of me that he separated from the rest. I know that, much more surely after this talk with you. Something that will make the real me complete again, perhaps just a shadow somewhere in the cold. And when I looked down on myself and him and you and the black stone, I saw so much else. So much more than I could ever tell you. As if all time unrolled for me to see. One mere little life isn't much, is it, Mr. Gees?"

Again she smiled, contentedly, and in a way he wished he had lied to her, denied the existence of the shadows that the priests of the Unnamed and MacMorn had made. Yet he knew all the time that lying could not have saved her; this which talked to him was not all of Helen Aylener, and she must find and recapture that which MacMorn had robbed away. And now he knew; the shadow must be made, driven out from a life, before MacMorn's Unnamed would accept that life. So, somewhere out in the cold, driven from this Helen who smiled at him, wandered—

Perhaps! Or was it all illusion? She had asked him for truth, but what was truth?

"That's all I wanted to ask you, Mr. Gees, and all I wanted to tell you. Except, thank you very much. I'd like you to remember that as the last thing I said to you, except goodbye. Thank you very much."

But, when he stood up and for a moment held the hand she reached out to him, she said, "I'm so *very* sleepy, now. Goodbye, Mr. Gees."

HE OPENED the door for Margaret Aylener, and followed her to her drawing room after dinner that evening. At her request he had stayed out the week after giving evidence about the fatal fire that had destroyed MacMorn's house.

There was little left for either him or Margaret Aylener to say.

"I have told Callum not to plant another tree where the rowan was blown down. There is no need of them, now."

"No," he agreed.

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"I shall be the last Aylener, and we outlast the MacMorns." There was a spice of quiet satisfaction in her remark.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "why these things are permitted."

"I remember reading, once—" She paused to recollect the phrasing. "Yes, it was this. 'All that we do goes to the weaving of a pattern. We can only see the tags of threads and the semblance of a design, but God knows the right side of the pattern, and when we see it we shall understand.' Perhaps there is truth in that."

"By sight of that pattern, understand another one that I saw in a dream," he said thoughtfully.

"I should like you to tell me that dream." She smiled at him, confidently.

But he shook his head. "It involves too much," he said. "Everything, from beasts in primeval ooze to a fat man raking in a cheque. A girl in green and silver and myself. No, I could never tell anyone that dream."

"Green and silver!" She reflected over it. "I once had a shot satin green and silver dress. I gave it away, I remember."

He did not ask who had been the recipient of the dress. There was no need to ask. Very nearly, he recaptured the fragrance of the scent, for MacMorn's spells had been strong.

Instead, he said, "That was a very wise saying about the pattern, and how we shall yet see it. The more I think about this, the more it seems to fit God's plan."

For a time they sat silent. Elizabeth entered to take away the coffee tray. Miss Aylener said, "Mr. Green will be leaving early tomorrow morning, Elizabeth."

"Aye, madam."

The look she gave him was one of complete approval, and then she took up the tray and left the room. Margaret Aylener said: "I think Elizabeth likes you. She seems to relax for you."

"That's her relaxing, is it?" he observed. "Then I'm glad I don't have to face her when she's stiff. But you're well served."

"With a qualified medical man on the staff," she said. "But the specialist told me —I am going up to see her now, if you will forgive me. He told me, this is a form of pernicious anaemia—not all the skill in the world could save her, since she doesn't try to save herself. But one thing, before I go. Because I am going to say goodnight, and shall not see you again."

"Then the one thing?" he asked.

"I told you—if you brought MacMorn to his death, the half of all I have is yours. You did make an end of him. I meant it."

"If I took one farthing, Miss Aylener," he said soberly, "I should reckon myself no more than an assassin. I'm glad he's dead, glad I saw him shrive in flame, and still wish the life in him had lasted longer, so that he could feel one thousandth part of the agony his victims had to suffer on his infernal altar. But if I were starving, and you gave me a penny for other reasons than pure charity, I'd commit suicide there and then to cleanse myself from any payment for making an end of MacMorn. I feel like that about it."

"I understand, Mr. Green. I'm going to Helen, now, and there are no words I can leave with you—there is nothing I can give you, I see, in return for what you have done. But I say, and it means so pitifully little of all I feel—I say, thank you very much."

When she held out her slender, delicate hand, he lifted it to his lips. He said, "Goodnight, Miss Aylener."

She said, "Goodnight, Mr. Green. Thank you, very much."

* * *

Two months later, Miss Brandon handed him a small package marked *Personal* that had come with the morning's post.

It bore a Scottish postmark, and, scenting something to do with the Brachmornalachan affair, she felt a slight renewal of the irritation that had come to her over his statement that he would not dictate a report of the end of that case.

Being only human, she wanted very much to know what had happened during his second stay in Brachmornalachan.

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There were typed records of all his other cases, and this— Well, she wanted to know.

He took out a pocket knife and cut the string of the package with irritating deliberation. He stripped off the paper, dropping it in her wastepaper basket, and disclosed a small cardboard box. Opening the box, he revealed a tiny spray of rosemary, and a card. He read:

"From the wreath I laid on Helen's grave. "O[illegible]hore thank you, very much."

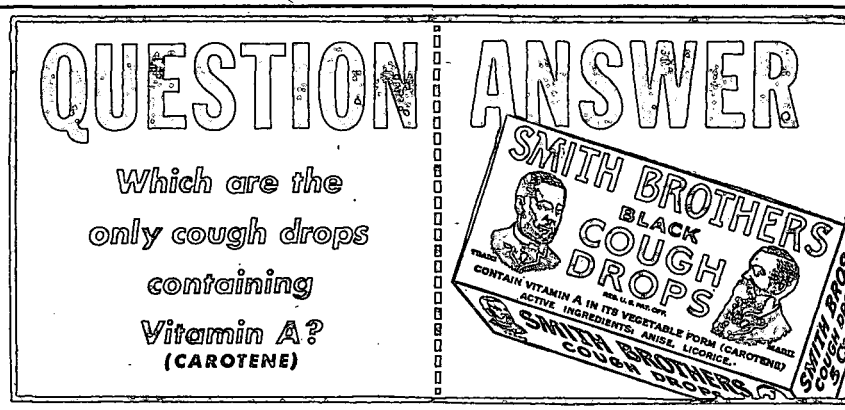
He had [illegible]eld the card that Miss Brandon coulu [illegible]d it with him. There was on it nothing but the writing, nothing to indicate who had sent it. He said: "That was very kind of her. Not that Helen meant anything to me, for she didn't—"

"I didn't ask," Miss Brandon said.

"No." He sounded very thoughtful. "The rest—it was all illusion."

Gail— Illusion!

THE END



LOOKING AHEAD!

MINIONS OF MARS

Remember Omega, that skittish Disembodied Intelligence who romps the world of tomorrow? Well, he's working his miracles again, assisting his protegé Mark to battle mightily in the interests of Justice, the Democratic Principle, and Hilarity. Beginning a rollicking and unique fantastic novel by

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Up North the Redcoats know the signs. When the wolves cry to the gray sky and the hidden guns can be heard above the thunder of swift water—then a Mountie must travel in the company of peril. An exciting short novel by

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THE HORRIBLE HORNBILLS

When a girl's entire family is locked into a freight car normally intended for peaches, and the car is already on its way across-country—well, it's a honey of a novelet about the fruit country, and we should have called it "The Grapes of Mirth"—by

CRAWFORD SULLIVAN

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—JANUARY 13

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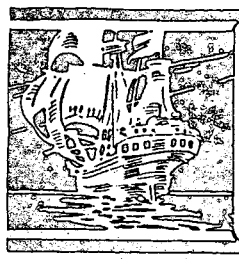

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

DID we ever ask for more fireworks in this department? We have a vague memory of making some such request. The point is that the required goods are certainly being delivered these days. One week our correspondents are tilting away at each other over theology and freedom of thought; the next week the war between the sexes flares up like an ignited oil well.

It's interesting to note that almost all the furor seems to center around fantastics. The Future, then, is box-office—perhaps because the Past has been forgotten and the Present is not entirely satisfactory. . . . In regard to the letter below, we ask you to remember back to a Mr. Wilkins who addressed the ladies not too gallantly in this department.

MRS. JOHN MITCHELL

So, my friend, Don Wilkins, is sticking out his neck again? And, "is the lady armed"; well, she is—to the teeth.

But, I was taught to *respect* my elders, so although I have an answer and am armed to the teeth, I'll try to defend myself in a ladylike way, and go Mr. Wilkins one better in manners at any rate.

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Increase your income at home by new, simple Wentworth Tempera Color method. We instruct you and supply you with work. Write today for FREE BOOKLET.

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Easy to use Viscose Home Method heals many old leg sores caused by leg congestion, varicose veins, swollen legs and injuries or no cost for trial if it fails to show results in 10 days. Describe the cause of your trouble and get a FREE BOOK.

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I see that D. W. has already "typed" me as "emotionally unstable". Now, Mr. Wilkins, maybe the majority of the women are so, but I just don't like the way you put it—it got my Irish up. I'll bet you'd make a good professor, you sound like one—a sour one. But definitely you're no psychiatrist.

Presuming I am "emotionally unstable" because I like to read fantastic stories and defend the authors of such stories, what would I be classed or typed if I had stated a liking for cold-blooded murder mysteries? Would I then be typed a homicidal maniac?

That sounds pretty strong and perhaps a little silly, but as I said before, my Irish is up. I'm not jumping up and loudly defending the weaker sex—that stuff went out with long skirts. However, I'll stand up for or against either sex if I think it's right or wrong.

From the stories you quote in your letter, Mr. Wilkins, you evidently are an old reader of the ARGOSY, and I envy you. I've been reading it for about eleven years and I'm twenty-three now and still going strong for the magazine. Hope I can some day match your record.

No, I'm not making up, I'm still angry. To come to the point, I don't think Mr. Wilkins meant to type me; its just the old story of slamming the weaker sex to get 'em mad. This bickering back and forth is kid stuff. Maybe you're in your second childhood, Mr. Wilkins? (Pardon me, I couldn't resist that one.) At any rate, I contend that you, D. W., ought to read what you like and let other folks read and give their opinions of what they like without you giving us a "classification".

Well, Editor, maybe I didn't get the last word in. I know I didn't 'cause I forgot to say: Here's more power to the ARGOSY, it's a dandy magazine, and squeeze in several more Theodore Roscoe stories each week for Prof. Wilkins. (Heh. Heh!)

CHICAGO, ILL.

For that last paragraph, Mrs. Mitchell, the entire staff *and* Mr. Roscoe bow gratefully. There will be more of him anon. But in the present conflict, ARGOSY remains happily on the sidelines.

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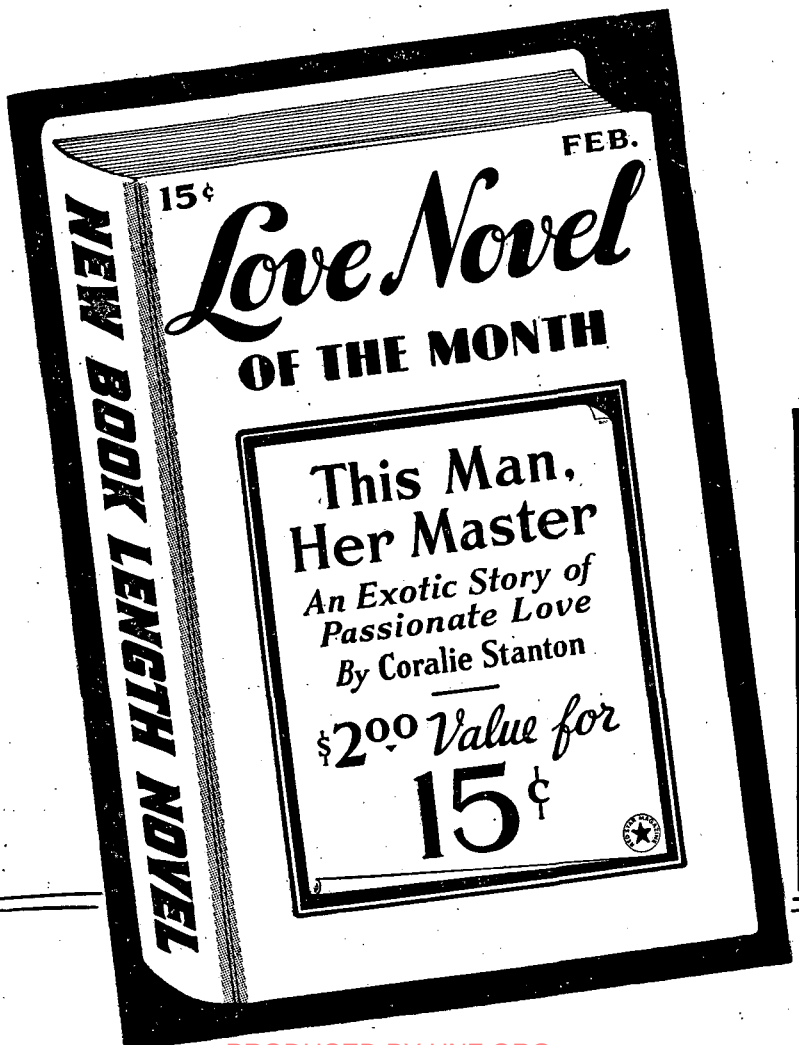

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CATARRH

Four Fold Method Attacks Catarrhal Symptoms 4 Ways to Bring Quick, Blessed Relief

PAMPHLET SENT FREE

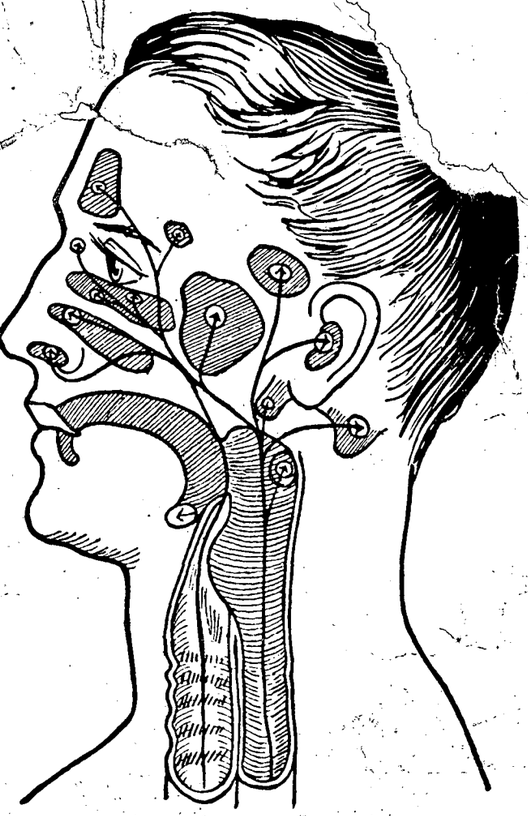
Here is a Free Offer that no reader of this magazine suffering the disagreeable, annoying symptoms of Nasal Catarrh and Congestion can afford to ignore. Are any of these troubles yours?

NASAL CATARRH, CLOGGED NOSTRILS, DIFFICULT BREATHING, HAWKING, BLOWING, SNUFFING, DULLED HEARING CAUSED BY NASAL CONGESTION.

Have you a "Catarrhal" Cough, Clogged Nostrils, Phlegm-Filled Throat? Do you have head noises, or a buzzing or ringing in your ears? Is your hearing growing dull? Does your nose feel "stuffed up" or are you continually obliged to snuffle, spit, hawk and clear your throat? Is breathing through the nose often difficult? Have you frontal headaches? Do you catch cold easily and is there a chronic mucous discharge that makes frequent nose blowing an embarrassing necessity? Have you an offensive catarrhal breath? These are some of the common, easily noted symptoms that may be caused by Nasal Catarrh and it may pay you to check them carefully.

If any of these symptoms are yours, this notice must surely interest you and cause you to write at once for 4 WAY PAMPHLET. It is free for the asking.

This new Four Fold Method goes after Catarrhal Symptoms in four different ways instead of one to clear accessible catarrhal accumulations right out of the head, throat and nasal passages. Thus it has brought quick, effective results that have already given joy and blessed relief to thousands.



The shaded portions of this diagram show the "air spaces" of the head. Catarrh collects in many of these places and causes the disagreeable Catarrhal Symptoms.

SATISFACTION OR NO CHARGE

Only a chronic sufferer from catarrhal conditions such as noted above can fully appreciate how great would be the joy if all these symptoms were quickly and thoroughly cleared away. Here is your chance to learn about and try for yourself this highly successful method, developed and approved in England and now being introduced throughout America on "Satisfaction Or No Charge" terms, which makes its trial by any catarrhal sufferer an easy matter. It costs nothing to find out about it beyond postage of your inquiry and if you have Catarrh trouble, by all means write at once to the Heather Company, Dept. 106, Adams, N. Y. for PAMPHLET with full particulars and directions. It does not obligate you to spend one penny for treatment. Do this at once while you are thinking about it for there is no assurance that this offer and announcement will ever be repeated in this magazine. So before you forget it or lose the address, CUT OUT THIS COUPON AND MAIL IT TODAY.

Do you want a new joy of living? Then cut out the Coupon below and mail it today. It may open the pathway to your own prompt and gloriously welcome relief from the Catarrhal evils you know so well, just as it has done and is doing for a host of others.

FREE COUPON

THE HEATHER COMPANY, Dept. 106, ADAMS, N. Y.

Please send PAMPHLET with full information and directions for the Four Way Method.

NAME.....

ADDRESS .....

CITY..... STATE.....

PLEASE PRINT NAME IN BLOCK CAPITALS

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